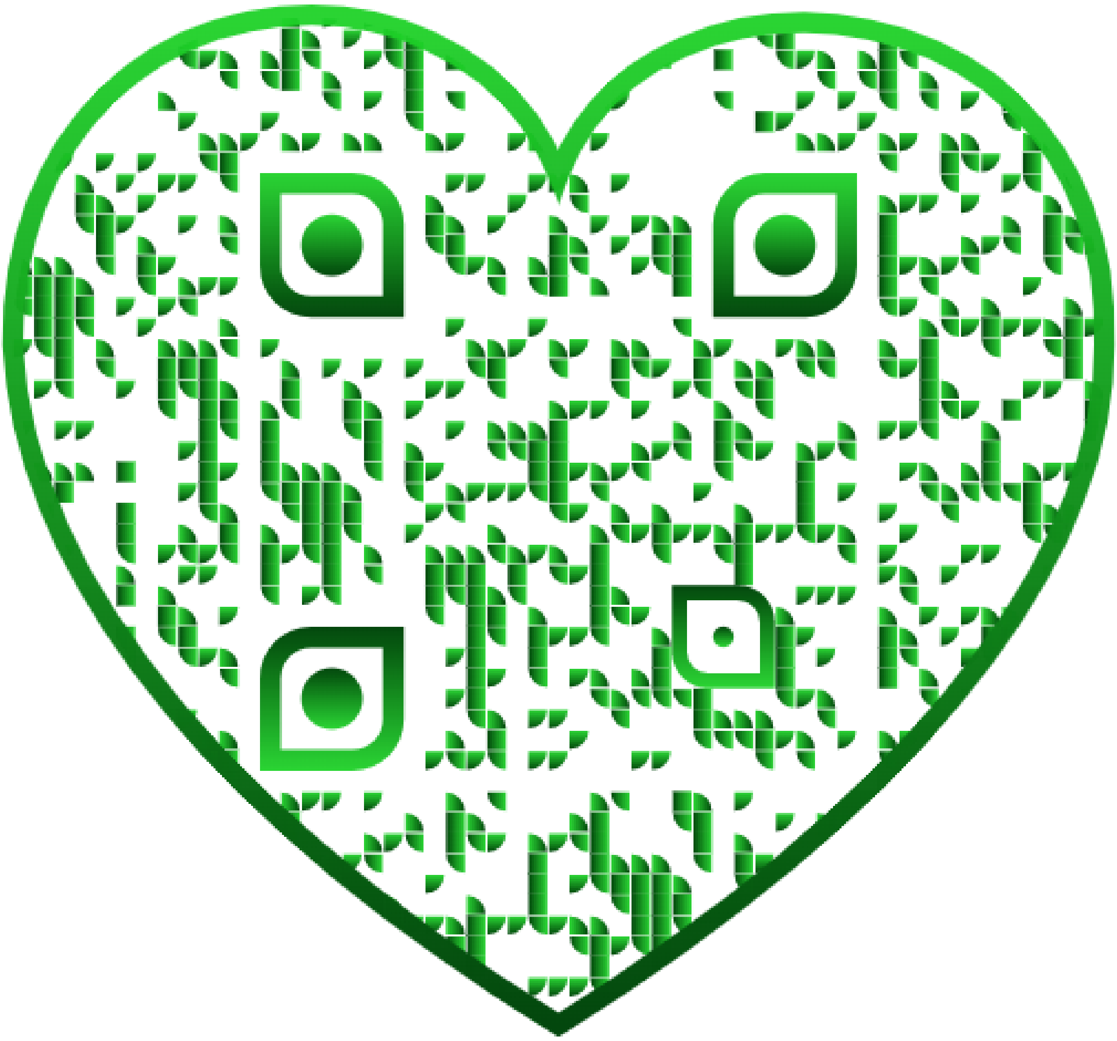
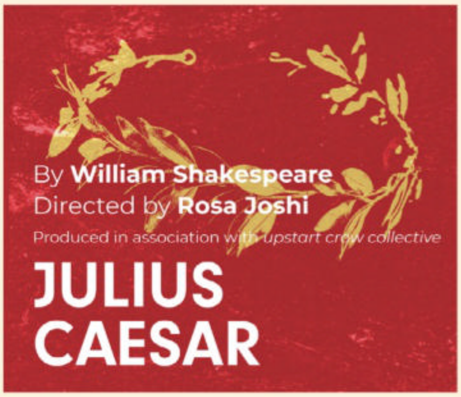
AMERICAN THEATRE

WINTER 2025
VOL 41, NO. 2
THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

The Teaching Issue

Lessons in show business p. 20
Playwriting and docutheatre how-tos p. 14 & 36
The complete text of 'Eureka Day' p. 56





By **William Shakespeare**
Directed by **Rosa Joshi**
Produced in association with *upstart crow collective*

JULIUS CAESAR

By **Oscar Wilde**
Directed by **Desdemona Chiang**

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Directed by **Tim Bond**
August Wilson's

JITNEY

By **Karen Zacarías**
Directed by **Blake Robison**
West Coast Premiere

SHANE

By **William Shakespeare**
Directed by **Lisa Peterson**

AS YOU LIKE IT

By **James Ijames**
Directed by **Elizabeth Carter**

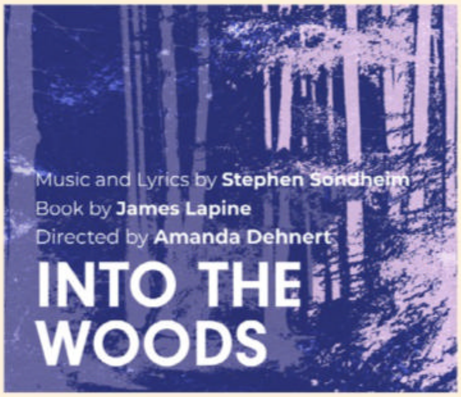
FAT HAM

By **Octavio Solis**
Directed by **Lisa Portes**

QUIXOTE NUEVO

By **William Shakespeare**
Directed by **Terri McMahon**

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



Music and Lyrics by **Stephen Sondheim**
Book by **James Lapine**
Directed by **Amanda Dehnert**

INTO THE WOODS

JOIN US FOR AN ANNIVERSARY SEASON TO REMEMBER

TICKETS ON SALE NOW
Visit **OSFashland.org**

Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

90 YEARS OF OSF

Savage
FIND WHAT WORKS FOR YOU!
Classes in Acting, Directing, Improv, Solo Shows, Playwriting, and more!
thebarrowgroup
PERFORMING ARTS TRAINING
LEARN MORE!
BARROWGROUP.ORG
520 8th Ave 9th floor, New York, NY 10018
PHOTOS BY JOLENE SIANA PHOTOGRAPHY.

TABLE *of* CONTENTS

VOL. 41 NO. 2 WINTER 2025

20 Unfinished Business

BY ROSIE BROWNLOW-CALKIN

Theatre students are usually taught how to do the job. Shouldn't they also learn more about how to get the job?

26 Teaching the Moment

BY JACQUELINE E. LAWTON

In this roundtable conversation, leaders in theatrical higher education discuss the challenges of the day and how they're facing them.

30 Taken to School

BY DAVID JOHN CHÁVEZ

At high school theatre programs across the country, educators are stoking excitement and building a future, both for their students and for the art form.

★ *Playscript* ◆

56 The complete text of Jonathan Spector's unsettlingly timely comedy *Eureka Day*, plus a Q&A with the playwright by director Anna D. Shapiro

- **4** From the Editor
- **6** From the Executive Office
- **10** Front and Center
- **16** People to Watch
- **36** An excerpt from KJ Sanchez's new book *The Radical Act of Listening: Making Documentary and Investigative Theatre*
- **40** Production Notebook by Nikki Massoud: New York Theatre Workshop's *We Live in Cairo*
- **50** The past, present, and uncertain future of Frank Lloyd Wright's Kalita Humphreys Theatre in Dallas by Courtney Thomas
- **136** A Glance Back

COVER: *Elan Zafir, Mar Cox, Erica Chamblee, Sam Lunay, and Regina Aquino in Mosaic Theater's 2019 production of Jonathan Spector's "Eureka Day." (Photo by Christopher Banks)*

CORRECTIONS: *In our Fall 2024 issue, we mistakenly wrote that contributor Angie Ahlgren teaches at Bowling Green University; she left that job last May. Also, in an article about productions of* Waitress, *we misspelled properties manager Ellen Houlden's name. And in a Q&A with playwright Jeremy Tiang, we misspelled the name of director Michael Leibenluft.*

AMERICAN THEATRE

◆

PUBLISHED BY

Theatre Communications Group

◆

Kelundra Smith, *Director of Publications*

Rob Weinert-Kendt, *Editor-in-Chief*

Jerald Raymond Pierce, *Managing Editor*

Gabriela Furtado Coutinho, *Digital Editor*

Nsenga Burton, *Guest Editor,* Theatre Futures

Amanda Andrei, *Contributing Editor*

Tara McCarthy, *Art Director*

Kathy Sova, *Editorial Director, TCG Books*

Emma Walsh, *Playscript Editor*

Carol Van Keuren, *Advertising Director*

Joshua H. Jenkins, *Marketing and Communications Director*

Jen Cleary, *Director of Membership*

Monet Cogbill, *Design Manager*

Jim O'Quinn, *Founding Editor in Memoriam*

Terry Nemeth, *Founding Publisher*

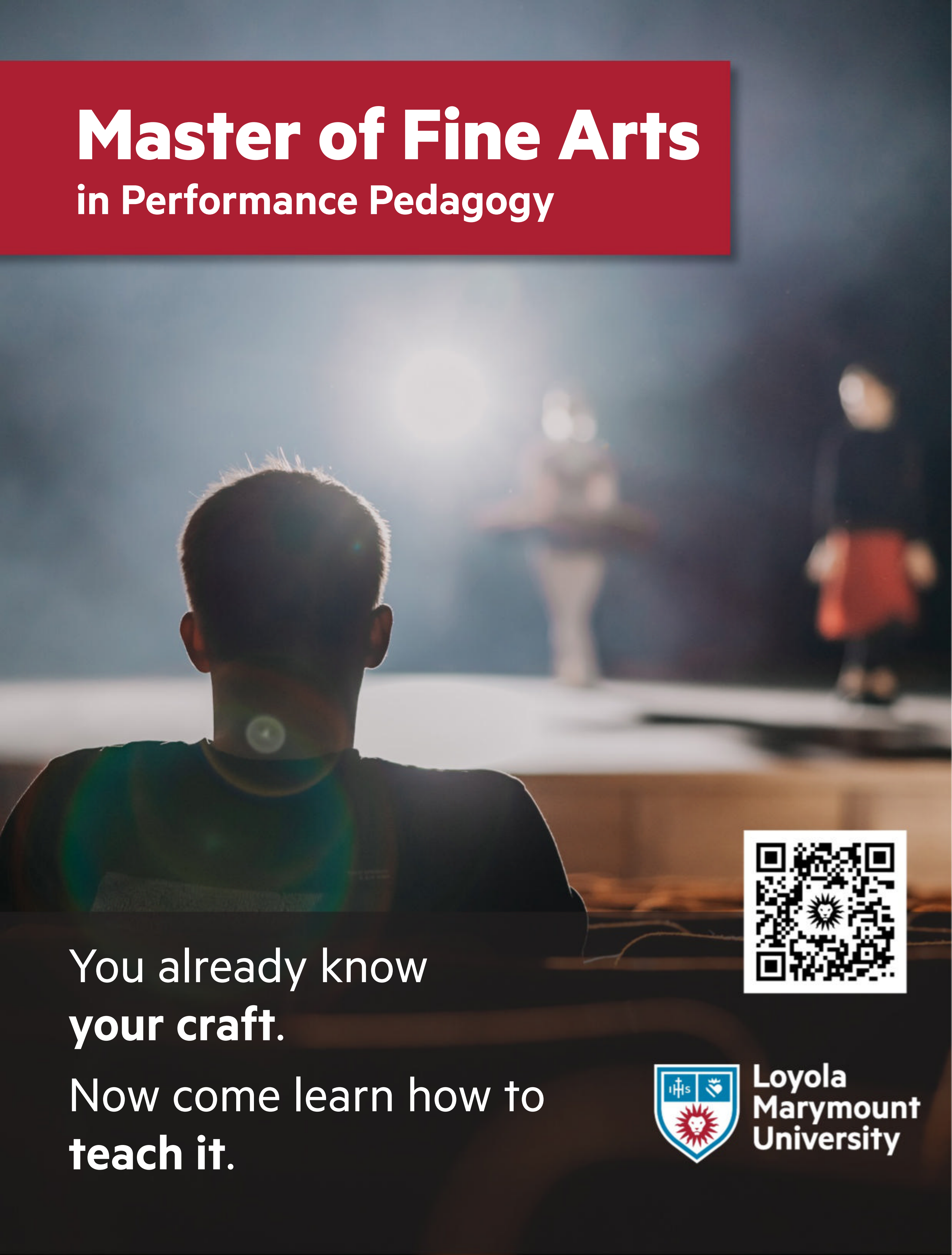
LaTeshia Ellerson, *Co-Executive Director, National Engagement*

Emilya Cachapero, *Co-Executive Director, National and Global Programming*

Alisha Tonsic, *Co-Executive Director, National Operations and Business Development*

Since 1961, Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for U.S. theatre, leads for a just and thriving theatre ecology.

American Theatre *(ISSN 8750-3255) (USPS 025-781) is published quarterly by Theatre Communications Group, 520 Eighth Avenue, Floor 20, Suite 2000, New York, NY 10018-4156. Periodical postage is paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Theatre, 520 Eighth Avenue, Floor 20, Suite 2000, New York, NY 10018-4156.*



Master of Fine Arts

in Performance Pedagogy

You already know
your craft.

Now come learn how to
teach it.

Loyola
Marymount
University

From the Editor

This magazine launched in the spring of 1984, amid the reelection campaign of incumbent President Ronald Reagan and the Democratic primary to pick his challenger, Walter Mondale, who would later that year go down to a crushing 525-to-13 electoral college defeat (Mondale won only his home state of Minnesota and the District of Columbia). Among other things, that election resoundingly confirmed the nation's rightward turn after decades of New Deal and Great Society liberalism.

How did these politics show up in our pages? Most obviously, the increasingly chilly climate for federal arts funding was a recurring subject of the magazine's coverage, including regular columns by TCG's deputy director, Lindy Zesch. The National Endowment for the Arts was then still giving money directly to individual artists, including playwrights and translators, but from the start TCG and *AT* were sounding alarms about a battle that would flame into a full-blown culture war in the ensuing decade.

Also in the year our magazine began, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was already killing thousands of people, a disproportionate number of them in the arts, in a metastasizing crisis that would both exacerbate extant homophobia and stir a generation of human rights activists to demand equality under the law. It would also show up onstage in era-defining classics like *The Normal Heart* and *As Is* (*Angels in America* would come roughly a decade later, though it germinated, and was set, in the Reagan '80s).

One curious series of stories in our first year followed the controversy over whether Dario Fo, the Italian author of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, would be allowed to attend the play's opening on Broadway. Initially denied entry on the basis of a McCarthy-era law barring left-wing visitors, Fo and his wife, Franca Rame, were finally granted permission to travel. A true man of the theatre, Fo made the most of the moment, thanking President Reagan for the free publicity.

I cite this history not to suggest merely that we've been there, done that, when it comes to the kind of reactionary politics and radical retrenchment that characterized the Reagan era, and which are already part of what we must now call, however grudgingly, the Trump era. But I find it useful in this fraught moment to recall that this magazine, no less than the artists and companies it covers, entered the drama mid-scene, and that we all have roles to play in this still unfolding story, roles assigned by our moment more than by our own choosing. One question among the many that swirl around this moment of profound national and global indeterminacy—indeed, one of the few we can answer right now—is whether we accept the unique challenges that history has handed us or retreat from them into denial and diversion.

This question is faced by the characters in *We Live in Cairo*, a new musical about the high hopes and dashed dreams of the Egyptian revolution of 2011, which Nikki Massoud writes about in depth in this issue. And it is greeted with varying degrees of equanimity by the parents of students at the Berkeley private school depicted in Jonathan Spector's blistering comedy *Eureka Day*, printed in full starting on p. 56. Whether weighing the merits of democracy or vaccines, these shows find new ways within old forms to reflect our fractious times and do what theatre uniquely can do, and will be called on to do with fresh urgency in the coming years: make us feel the human stakes of these conflicts in ways no newscast or op-ed can.

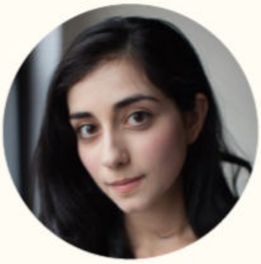
This issue also contains our annual spotlight on theatre training, an inherently forward-looking subject, with a particular focus on teachers and the crucial work they do to equip new generations of dreamers and makers for tomorrow's theatre and tomorrow's world. That there will be a tomorrow, and that we will all be part of it, is some cause for hope—though hardly for complacency. The drama has more scenes to play before the curtain. Are we ready for our cue?

Rob Weinert-Kendt

Rob Weinert-Kendt, Editor-in-Chief

Contributors

DAVID JOHN CHÁVEZ *is a theatre critic and reporter based in San Jose, California, with over 20 years of experience in educational theatre. In his reporting for us on efforts to help high school students find success in the performing arts (p. 30), Chávez said he was both surprised and heartened to find theatre companies leaning into their part in building a strong industry ecosystem. "This is theatre's best chance to build the ideal they want in their spaces," Chávez said. "As long as diversity and investment is at the effort's heart, theatre can thrive in amazing ways going forward."*



NIKKI MASSOUD *is a writer and actor who found her experience of behind-the-scenes reporting on a new musical about the Tahrir Square protests,* We Live in Cairo *(p. 40), "deeply moving," not only for her own affinity with the story—as an Iranian Canadian American, she said, her life was "also shaped by a revolution"—but for what she saw revealed in the process. "Every single member of the team of* We Live in Cairo *had a deeply personal connection to the material," Massoud recalled. "So much time, research, and passion went into the making of the show."*

THE ROCKIES' HOME FOR NEW PLAYS

WORLD PREMIERE

THE RESERVOIR

A cross-generational recovery story served with outrageous humor and truth

JAN 17 – MAR 9

WORLD PREMIERE

THE SUFFRAGETTE'S MURDER

A farcical who-done-it set in the early days of the women's suffrage movement

FEB 7 – MAR 9

COLORADO NEW PLAY SUMMIT

**4 New Play Readings. 2 World Premieres.
1 Jam-Packed Weekend.**

MAR 1 & 2

DENVER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
Theatre Company

DENVERCENTER.ORG
OFFICIAL TICKETS: 303.893.4100

SEASON SPONSOR
THE SHUBERT FOUNDATION INC.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
CBS COLORADO
THE DENVER POST COMMUNITY
We Fund Culture. SCFD

From the Executive Office

This Winter issue is reaching you as the calendar turns over and New Year's resolutions are yet to be fulfilled. Perhaps this issue can be a hopeful springboard to motivate us through the rest of the winter ahead, when the air is cold, the nights are long, and summer is still distant.

During this season, I'm reflecting on recent events here in the U.S. with the awareness that our future is intricately connected to what happens in the world around us.

I live in New York, and in late November, I was excited to see *We Live in Cairo* at New York Theatre Workshop (covered in this issue, p. 40). The musical, with an ensemble of six Arab actors, begins with the protests at Tahrir Square and follows the characters through the aftermath of the post-Mubarak years. Egypt joined the Arab Spring on Jan. 25, 2011, with tens of thousands gathering in Cairo and thousands more in other Egyptian cities. They were protesting a ruler who had been in power for 30 years, before many of them were born.

As I watched the journeys of the musical's student activists—some of them already fully embracing a path of protest, and some in the throes of breaking through a wall of fear—the invincibility of youth came to mind. This risk-taking, coupled with an absolute sense of purpose and the strong conviction that change is possible, fuels many in the age group that we at TCG call "the inheritors": those in their teens to 34 years old who are inheriting a world in which economic, social, and political choices were made by adults decades older.

I was 15 years old when I joined the student strike at San Francisco State University. It was the longest student strike in U.S. history, lasting from Nov. 6, 1968, to March 21, 1969, and it changed academic institutions forever. When the strike ended, the administration, in response to student demands, established the country's first College of Ethnic Studies. The administration also agreed to create a special admissions program for 400 students of color for the fall semester of 1969. I graduated high school a year early and went to SFSU. It was a time when my friends and I, and young people throughout the world, were trying to understand and change the direction of a world in chaos and crisis. In college I met teachers who would become my mentors and champions, as they recognized the artist and leader I was becoming.

Each January *American Theatre* focuses on theatre training, and Jacqueline Lawton's roundtable with five theatre professionals and educators covers the realities and difficulties of their jobs (p. 26). It also gives us a window into their earliest personal memories of politics and how they helped to shape them. They share adolescent experiences that gave them insights into the complexities of power, race, and politics, which in turn evolved into a foundation for how they work with youth. We build future generations of theatremakers and theatre leaders by teaching and mentoring. A key part of educating is encouraging students to think about world building and world changing, and developing their own nascent sense of leadership.

You may already know about Young Invincibles, an organization started by a group of students in the summer of 2009, who believed in their generation's capacity to stand up and make themselves heard. They were eager to organize friends, educate the public about new health insurance options, and develop real solutions to the challenges they face. Young people are a historically underrepresented constituency, and Young Invincibles' focus is on ensuring young communities with the least access to political and economic power have a say. They are building a community of young leaders to take action for social change, sharing the stories of young adults, and providing tools for their generation to make smart economic choices and embark on mission-driven social enterprise ventures. The work shared by those most impacted by health care, higher education, workforce, and financial policies is also a source of collective care.

At the end of the year, I also had a chance to see *The Art of Care*, conceived and directed by Derek Goldman, developed with the performers/storytellers, and produced at Mosaic Theatre in Washington, D.C. Like *We Live in Cairo*, this was an ensemble piece with music. The central theme is world building, in which care for others is an antidote to feelings of isolation and loneliness. As I left the theatre that night, a thought from the play stayed with me: *What if interdependence is even more important than independence?* Our practice as theatre people is world building. But world building, and world changing, can only succeed with connectivity and collaboration.

I have a quote-for-the-day calendar on my desk, and as I write this, today's is appropriately from Albert Camus: "In the middle of winter, I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer." Camus was committed to the value of individual human life, believing that even in the most difficult and challenging times, like winter, there is a resilient and enduring hope or strength within us, like the warmth of summer, that cannot be defeated—that within us is an inner resilience to overcome adversity. May your summer be ever invincible!

Emilya Cachapero, Co-Executive Director,
National and Global Programming

Boston University College of Fine Arts
School of Theatre

BOSTON
UNIVERSITY

OFFERING MFA PROGRAMS IN

- Costume Design
- Costume Production
- Directing
- Lighting Design
- Production Management
- Scene Design
- Scene Painting (Artisan Certificate)
- Sound Design
- Technical Production

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEATRE OFFERS A 60 CREDIT MFA DESIGNED FOR TWO-YEAR COMPLETION. THE MFA OFFERS INDIVIDUALIZED MENTORSHIP, CAREER PLANNING, AND CREATIVE GROWTH THROUGH A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO THEATRE MAKING ALONG WITH ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CONVERSATIONS WITH INFLUENTIAL PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS IN AN INTIMATE CLASSROOM SETTING

For more information visit
BU.EDU/CFA/THEATRE
or email
THEATRE@BU.EDU

Orlando, 2023. Directed by Vanessa Ogbuehi. Photo by Katie Nelson

PALM BEACH pbd DRAMAWORKS 25 YEARS

Theatre to Think About!

MPRESS
RIXTON
E GREEN
GANG
RAYNE
HIPPODR

2024/25 SEASON

November 1 – June 8

William Hayes & Colin McPhillamy
The Dresser, Dec. 2024
Curtis Brown Photography

palmbeachdramaworks.org

Don & Ann Brown Theatre
West Palm Beach, FL

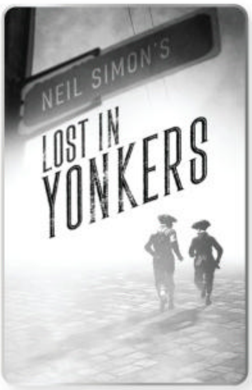
pfnp perlberg festival of New Plays

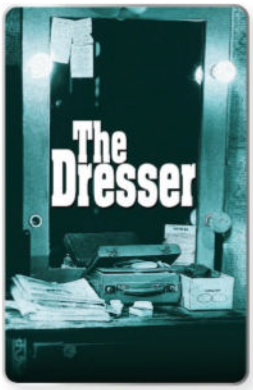
JAN. 17-19, 2025

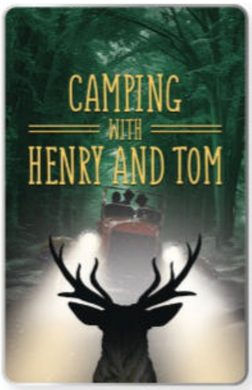
Season Sponsors/Executive Producers : Diane & Mark Perlberg

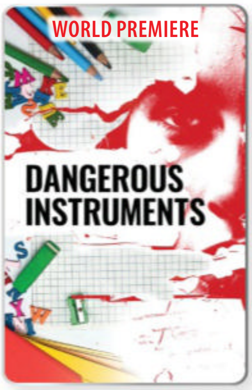
Cultural Council for Palm Beach County · Discover The Palm Beaches Florida, Funded by the Tourist Development Council · Palm Beach County Florida · Florida Arts & Culture · National Endowment for the Arts arts.gov

Palm Beach Dramaworks' 2024-25 Season






CAMPING WITH HENRY AND TOM



Twenty-fifth anniversaries are traditionally commemorated with a gift of silver. But when Palm Beach Dramaworks embarks on its twenty-fifth anniversary season in November, what the company has in store for its audience is pure gold. PBD will celebrate this milestone occasion with an eclectic array of invigorating plays that epitomize the notion of "Theatre to Think About."

The season features revivals of Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser* and Mark St. Germain's *Camping with Henry and Tom*, two compelling plays that were performed early in the company's history; the world premiere of Gina Montet's *Dangerous Instruments*, which continues PBD's commitment to new plays; Neil Simon's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lost in Yonkers*; and Stephen Karam's Tony Award-winning *The Humans*.

"When PBD was founded in 2000, we believed that there were local audiences hungry for challenging work, plays that illuminate the human condition and resonate in deeply personal ways," said Producing Artistic Director William Hayes. "We were naïve enough to think, 'If you build it, they will come.' It turned out that we were correct. We are so grateful to the community for their steadfast support and encouragement as we have expanded and evolved."

That evolution is exemplified by the company's new plays festival. Launched in 2019, it officially became the Perlberg Festival of New Plays last season. PBD's goal is for the festival to become a leader in fostering the future of the American theatre canon. This popular annual event, which will be held from January 17-19, 2025, features professional readings of five developing plays, each one followed by a post-performance discussion. "Playwrights have told us again and again how nurturing, informative, and invaluable the festival is for them," said Hayes. "And our audiences love the opportunity to offer feedback to the playwrights, as it gives them a part in the development process."

Here's a look at each of the season's plays:

LOST IN YONKERS
By Neil Simon
November 1-17, 2024
Set during World War II, this funny and touching Pulitzer Prize-winning memory play is both an exploration of the wounds inflicted by family, and a testament to the power of familial love and resiliency.

THE DRESSER
By Ronald Harwood
December 20, 2024 - January 5, 2025
The co-dependent – if unequal – relationship between Sir, a renowned but fading actor, and Norman, his devoted, self-sacrificing dresser, is the heartbeat of this warts-and-all, tragicomic valentine to the transcendent magic of theatre.

THE HUMANS
By Stephen Karam
February 14 - March 2, 2025
"A family play that is sort of infected by my love of the thriller genre," is how the playwright once described this Tony Award-winning comedy drama, in which the foibles, fears, and fragilities of an American family play out with great insight, humor, and compassion.

CAMPING WITH HENRY AND TOM
By Mark St. Germain
April 11 - 27, 2025
A work of fiction inspired by an actual 1921 camping trip taken by Warren G. Harding, Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison – three men with starkly different personalities and world views – the play deals with issues and ideas that remain as relevant today as they were 100 years ago.

World Premiere
DANGEROUS INSTRUMENTS
By Gina Montet
May 23 - June 8, 2025
Laura, a single mother, finds herself thrust into a gripping battle against a broken system when her son, Daniel, spirals into darkness. She must confront a parent's deepest fears and sacrifice everything to rescue Daniel from the brink of becoming America's next tragic headline.

Don & Ann Brown Theatre · 201 Clematis Street, West Palm Beach, Florida 33401
For ticket information contact the box office at (561) 514-4042, or visit www.palmbeachdramaworks.org.

FRONT & CENTER

WINTER 25 ◆ *New, — Now, — Next* VOL 41, NO. 02

I'll Be Your Mirror

By Gabriela Furtado Coutinho

Sarah Bellamy wanted mirrors. At the Theatre Communications Group conference in June, the Penumbra Theatre president invoked Junot Díaz's notion that vampires don't have reflections. "If you want to make a human being into a monster," Díaz once said, "deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves." In turn, what inspired his writing "was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it."

That was also the impetus behind Generation Now, a program created with a 2021 grant from the Mellon Foundation, in which four culturally specific theatres—Latino Theater Company, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Native Voices at the Autry, and Penumbra—would partner with Minneapolis's Children's Theatre Company (CTC) to co-commission new works from 16 playwrights. So far these have included Michi Barall, Ifa Bayeza, Dustin Tahmahkera, Lloyd Suh, Diana Oh, Kalani Queypo, Chadwick Johnson, Gabriel Rivas Gomez, Nambi E. Kelley, and an ensemble with Latino Theater Company.

A number of the commissioned plays have had workshops and readings since. Last October the program birthed its first full production at CTC: Michi Barall's *Drawing Lessons*, a play about a young graphic novelist's imagination at work, now licensed through Plays for New Audiences.

De'Anthony Jackson and Mars Niemi in "Drawing Lessons" at Children's Theatre Company. (Photo by Kaitlin Randolph)

Generation Now also aims to fill a new-work development gap in the American theatre landscape left by the departure of The Lark and other new-play incubators. The intention is to provide holistic development opportunities not only to widen the Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) canon, but also to inspire artists and advance the form.

"It's the conversations we have that set this partnership apart," said DeLanna Studi, artistic director of Native Voices at the Autry, which is developing Tahmahkera's play *Comanche Girl on the Moon*. "We were hesitant to join once approached. We wanted to make sure we wouldn't sacrifice the way we do things in our community approach to work with this bigger theatre." But then, Studi shared, CTC told her, "We want you to bring your expertise. We don't want to change anything about how you do your thing. We want to watch, learn, and hopefully grow as a cohort." As Barall put it at the TCG conference, "This program has allowed communities of color to speak to and support one another."

This symbiotic collaboration's "now" is plenty bright. Its future? Organizers aim to give more workshops to each title, incentivize other artistic leaders to produce and resource the new plays, and develop funding for full productions. This includes funding access, ticket subsidies, transportation, and engagement at CTC and other participating theatres.

All told, the program aims to offer 600 performances over five years for more than 200,000 anticipated audience members around the country. That's a lot of mirrors. •

BADA BRITISH AMERICAN DRAMA ACADEMY

Transformative theatre training programs

LONDON THEATRE PROGRAM

FALL 2025 & SPRING 2026

A semester-long study abroad conservatory acting program, immersing students in the rigorous theatre training of British and European conservatories. Aimed at talented undergraduates from American colleges and universities, and taught by an internationally acclaimed faculty, the intensive Program includes tutorials, theatre trips, and masterclasses with leading actors and theatre-makers, in one of the world's great theatre cities.

MIDSUMMER IN OXFORD PROGRAM

12 JULY – 10 AUGUST 2025

An intensive, four-week advanced-level conservatory acting course focusing on Shakespeare and classical drama, hosted by Oxford University's beautiful and historic Magdalen College. The Program is open to actors over age 18 at both undergraduate and graduate levels as well as professional actors, and includes a theatre trip and masterclasses. The internationally-acclaimed faculty consists of leading British and European teaching artists and theatre-makers.

GREEK THEATRE PROGRAM

7 JUNE – 4 JULY 2025

This early summer course, based in London, Oxford and Epidaurus in Greece, explores the performance and reception of ancient Greek drama from antiquity to the present day, through both practical and contextual classes. Close attention is paid to both the cultural, social and political context of ancient Athens, and to the many meanings of Greek drama today. Participants will spend the first ten days of the course in London before travelling to Greece for ten full days and then returning to the UK for a final residency in Oxford, working with leading British and European teaching artists and theatre-makers throughout.

BLACK BRITISH THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

7 JUNE – 5 JULY 2025

Trace the social, cultural, intellectual and political developments that have come to define the theory, practice and aesthetics of Black British theatre and its practitioners during this early summer course based at BADA's home in London's Camden Town. Participants will analyse key playtexts that dramatise the Black British experience as well as identifying their dramaturgical and aesthetic underpinnings. There will be visits to places of interest and to performances that will support our understanding of the environment in which these plays are developed along with workshops and conversations with leading writers, actors, and directors.

MIDSUMMER CONSERVATORY PROGRAM

12 JULY – 2 AUGUST 2025

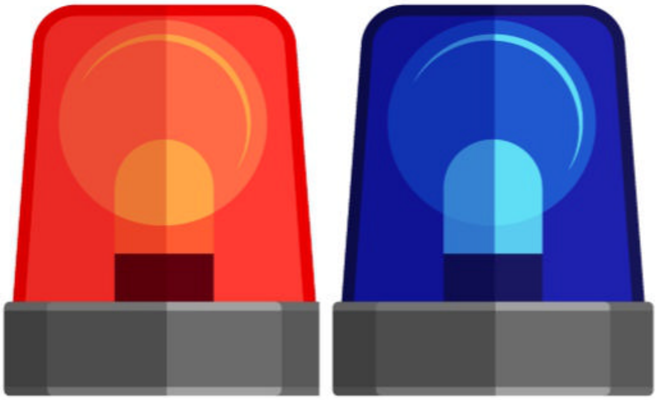
A three-week summer conservatory program in Shakespeare, for committed students aged 16 – 18 at the University of Oxford's St Hilda's College. Students immerse themselves in Shakespeare through Acting, Voice, and Movement classes along with Cultural Studies focused on the Elizabethan era. Students have masterclasses in Physical Theatre and Stage Combat and take cultural excursions to London and Stratford-upon-Avon.

BADA.ORG.UK

British American Drama Academy
Registered charity: 291796. Company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales. Reg No. 1828640.

PEACE, RAGE, AND HUMOR

By Jerald Raymond Pierce



Playwright Zora Howard and director Lileana Blain-Cruz don’t want to give too much away. As they discuss their upcoming production, *Bust*, premiering at Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre Feb. 13-March 16, before heading to Chicago’s Goodman Theatre in the spring, they keep the details simple: Retta and Reggie’s relaxing evening on the porch is interrupted when they witness a neighbor in an altercation with the police.

“Everything goes how we expect these things to go for Black people,” Howard said, “until something very unexpected occurs. The rest of the play is about figuring out what really happened.”

Howard, whose first play, *Stew*, was a finalist for the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, said that her aim is to create familiar worlds, but on a tilt—to draw audiences in with people and situations they think they recognize before giving them something else entirely.

As she was crafting *Bust*, Howard said she knew she wanted Blain-Cruz to direct. They hadn’t met, but Howard had followed the director’s work and appreciated her ability to balance carefully crafted intimacy with grand design and big concepts. During the Covid shutdown, the two spent time together in Cape Cod, absorbing both the serenity of their environment and the turmoil ravaging the country.

“That experience—peace and rage coinciding—has manifested inside the DNA of the show itself,” Blain-Cruz said. “I’m really moved to bring that provocation into life.”

Howard noted that sometimes writers feel doomed to repeat their early success. As she looks back at her growth since the close-knit family drama *Stew*, she said she was grateful for the time she’s had since to tinker with the play form. She compared her process to “a little kid on the floor with blocks. I move things around and build weird things that tilt to the side, so when I come back and build a house, it’s a really special house. It’s a stronger house, or it’s a more complex, dynamic house.”

One essential layer in this structure: laughter.

“Kind of inherent to the Black American experience is the humor that mitigates the horror—not even mitigates, but is a vehicle for survival,” said Howard. “My prayer is that this production can create a safe space for both of those experiences in one sitting. That is our challenge.” •

GARDEN VARIETY

By Jerald Raymond Pierce

In one chapter of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the vampire hunter Van Helsing explains the best ways to defeat the monster in their midst. One key data point: Dracula brought 50 boxes of earth from his home, without which he will die. One obvious method to kill him: Sterilize the earth.

That was playwright Ankita Raturi’s inspiration for *Fifty Boxes of Earth*, a response to Stoker’s novel viewed through the frames of queerness and xenophobia. The play, in its world premiere at Theater Mu in St. Paul, Minnesota (Feb. 27-March 16), follows Q, who moves into a new neighborhood with 50 boxes of earth for the community garden. When fantastical, improbable plants begin to grow, so too does one man’s distrust of Q, even as his daughter tries to befriend their new neighbor.

“It’s the idea that you’ve got to bring something with you to survive in a new place,” Raturi said, “and that the people that are already there are going to continually try to take that away from you, or make it impossible for something to grow and really treat you as monstrous.”

Director kt shorb’s production, featuring choreography from Ananya Chatterjea, will set out to create the mysterious garden with puppetry. Raturi pointed out that in South Asian performance practices, these are “not separate entities. I talk about this play a lot like a braid. The elements I am trying to braid are this dialogue drama element between the characters, this dance element representing the nature of the garden and the atmosphere, and then puppetry as what is growing, thriving, or dying in this atmosphere.”

Fifty Boxes is not an adaptation of *Dracula*, Raturi noted, but an exploration inspired by a “queering the canon” master class she took in grad school. Director shorb added that the play looks to balance an ecological ethos with human conflict. “You can still just watch it,” they affirmed, “as a story about a father and a child and this new person in a community garden.” •

Sirens illustration by Godruma/iStock; Garden illustration by Babeth Lafon

ready-SET-go!

ORDER YOUR BROADWAY QUALITY SET TODAY!

Clue

Cabaret

Evita

We have an inventory of dozens of complete set rental packages, props and drops that we can ship across the continental United States! Our professionally designed and constructed rental packages will bring the look of Broadway to your stage, whether you're a large regional theatre, or a small high school.

Elevate Your Art

THE Gateway SET RENTALS

www.setrentals.com/TCG
Email: rentals@thegateway.org

FORNÉS UNLEASHED

By Gabriela Furtado Coutinho

María Irene Fornés transcended. She wrote through her subconscious and taught many others to do the same. Since her passing in 2018, her legacy endures with students like Migdalia Cruz and Anne García-Romero, playwright-educators who have devoted essays, books, and workshops to reimagine the Fornés method. Said Cruz, "When you get a blessing from an elder, you pass it on."

So here's a Fornesian invitation: Gather a group of creatives. Align desks to touch in a circle, print some poems that may inspire the group, and get paper and pen ready. Appoint a writer-facilitator. Give yourself three or four hours. This "Animal Exercise" is modified by Cruz from Fornés's teaching at INTAR Theatre's Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Laboratory in the 1980s.

1. Do physical exercises for half an hour (light yoga, stretching, or tai chi).

2. Remember a pet or an animal somehow well known to you. Imagine in your mind's eye the shape of this animal. What is this animal's bone structure? Reach out and feel this animal. Does it have fur? Scales? What is the shape of its face? What does it smell like?

3. Select and read an existing poem that relates to the subject of your memory. Get to your desk. Center yourselves on your chair. Close your eyes again and visualize this animal.

4. Imagine this animal in a place where it feels boxed in, contained. How does it feel in this closed space? Safe? Or desperate to escape? What sounds does it make? Does it cry? Screech?

5. Draw a picture of this animal—and of the place where it finds itself.

6. Close your eyes. Imagine that one of your characters enters the place where the animal is enclosed. Allow your character to look directly into the animal's eyes. Then imagine the animal's face superimposed over the face of one of your characters. Allow your character to take on the personality of the animal. Does this change the character's face? How do the animal's feelings affect the character?

7. Draw the character's face with its new animal incorporation.

8. Close your eyes. Think of someone you despise. Write their first name on a piece of paper. Fold it and pass it to the person on your left. This is the name of your new character.

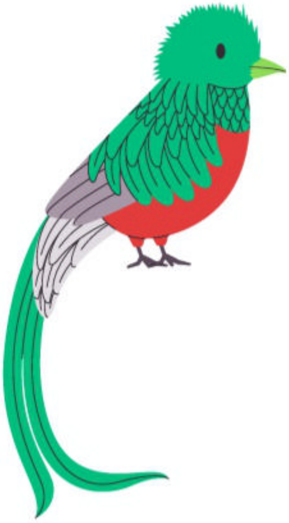
9. Close your eyes. Think of a crime or sin. Write it on a piece of paper and pass it to the person on your right. This is a crime committed by one of your characters—either the animal person or the despised person.

10. Begin a scene with these elements. Line: "You'll never find it." Object: A rusty piece of metal. Action: To hide the true nature of something.

When you're done, sustain the sacred space, sharing work with the group. Hopefully, as Cruz put it, "You'll unleash truth and learn to write like yourself." •

AZTEC AVENGERS

By Jerald Raymond Pierce



"Titles are a really big thing for me," said playwright Alvaro Saar Rios, who has given his newest play a really big one: *Quetzali and the Comic Book Queen vs. the Alebrije of Darkness: Live in the School Cafeteria*, bowing at Kentucky's Lexington Children's Theatre, Feb. 7-16, before touring through early May. "Even now, as an adult, if I saw a play that had such a long title, I would be like, 'You know what? I'm curious what this thing is.'"

Quetzali goes big in another way: It's part of the national TYA BIPOC Superhero Project, a Theatre for Young Audiences/USA effort designed to connect playwrights of color with TYA theatres. The effort, announced in 2022, matched 20 playwrights of color with 24 U.S. theatres to commission plays featuring superheroes of color.

Rios's story follows Lali Marquez, a teen who notices a mysterious Quetzal feather sprouting from her arm and goes on to uncover secrets and fight evildoers. Rios said he was inspired by his son's interest in Greek mythology, particularly as popularized for young readers, and wanted to do the same for Aztec mythology. He's not citing specific myths, he noted, but is drawing on cultural influences, including the green and red Quetzal feathers Aztec rulers wore as adornments. Lali's Quetzal feather is a bit like Thor's hammer or Batman's utility belt, Rios explained: the special object that helps her achieve superhuman feats.

Rios has also incorporated alebrijes, brightly colored Mexican folk art depictions of fantastical creatures, originally created in 1936 by artist Pedro Linares and seen in Pixar's *Coco*. While that film linked alebrijes and the Day of the Dead, they are also ripe for other magical associations.

Said Rios, "I was like, why don't we create this character called the 'Alebrije of Darkness'? Even just hearing that, I was like: This character just seems kind of evil." •

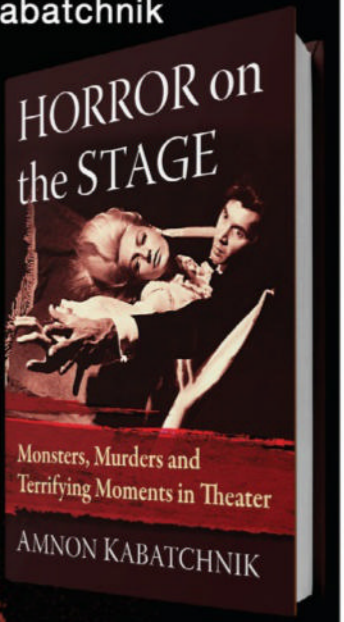
Writer illustration by Hurcal; Bird illustration by bakhtiar_zein/iStock

HORROR ON THE STAGE

MONSTERS, MURDERS AND TERRIFYING MOMENTS IN THEATER

by Amnon Kabatchnik

The history and behind-the-scenes tales of more than 500 stage productions about monsters, hauntings and horrors. Included are nightmarish adaptations of writings from Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells, Henry James, Arthur Conan Doyle, and others.

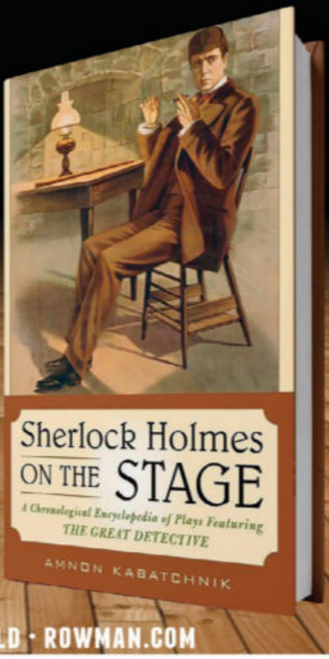

HORROR on the STAGE
Monsters, Murders and Terrifying Moments in Theater
AMNON KABATCHNIK

McFARLAND AND COMPANY · MCFARLAND.COM

SHERLOCK HOLMES ON THE STAGE

By Amnon Kabatchnik

Citing the many theatrical appearances of Holmes since his debut in 1893. Provides plot synopses, production details, and other unique features.

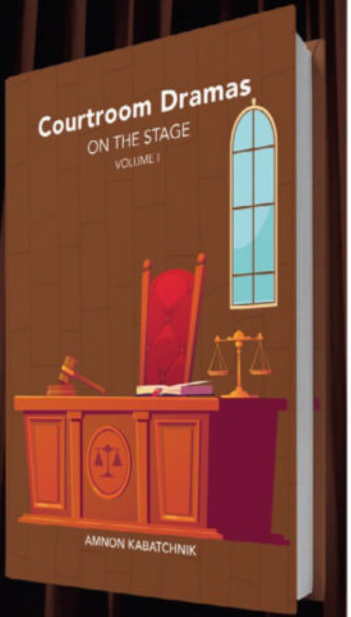

Sherlock Holmes ON THE STAGE
A Chronological Encyclopedia of Plays Featuring THE GREAT DETECTIVE
AMNON KABATCHNIK

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD · ROWMAN.COM

COURTROOM DRAMAS ON THE STAGE Vol. 1

by Amnon Kabatchnik

Covers more than fifty plays chronologically. Each includes a plot synopsis, production data, opinions by critics and scholars, as well as biographical sketches of playwrights and key actors-directors.


Courtroom Dramas ON THE STAGE
VOLUME I
AMNON KABATCHNIK

BEARMANOR MEDIA · BEARMANORMEDIA.COM

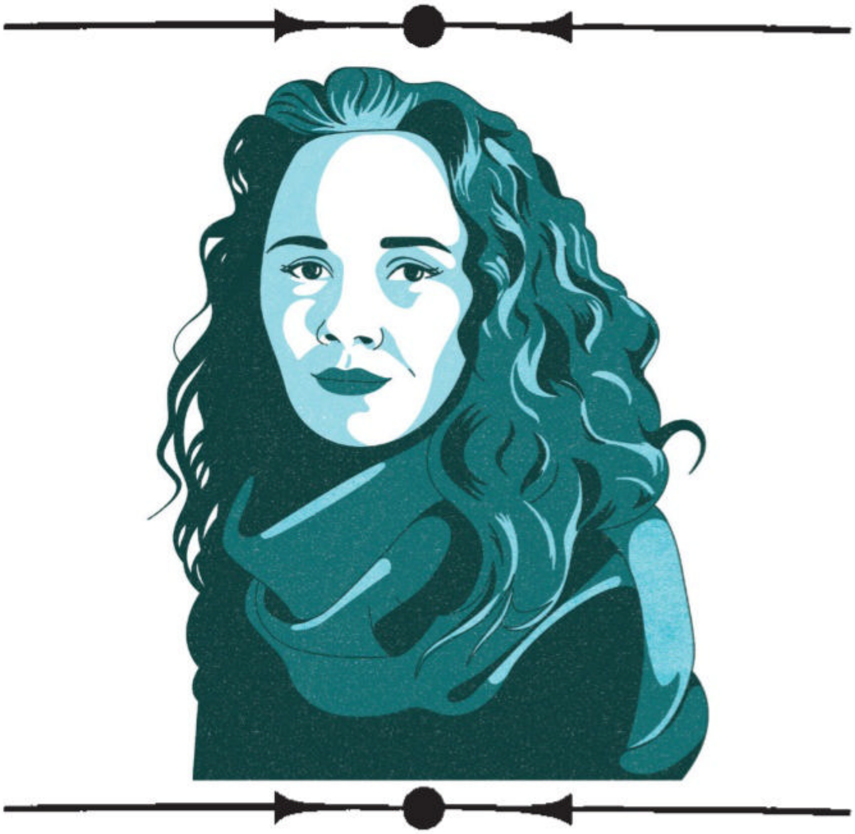
COURTROOM DRAMAS ON THE STAGE Vol. 2

by Amnon Kabatchnik

Volume II concentrates on trial plays mounted in the twentieth century. Authors of the main stream penning plays populated with judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, jurors, witnesses, and the accused, often charged with murder in the first degree

Courtroom Dramas ON THE STAGE
VOLUME II
AMNON KABATCHNIK

BEARMANOR MEDIA · BEARMANORMEDIA.COM



LARISSA FASTHORSE

The Los Angeles-based playwright behind The Thanksgiving Play *is bringing a new comedy to the stage with* Fake It Until You Make It*, which will have its world premiere at L.A.'s Center Theatre Group (Jan. 29-March 9) before heading to Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. (April 3-May 4).*

WHAT'S THE ELEVATOR PITCH FOR *FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT?*

It's a farce set in the world of nonprofit organizations that highlights the absurdities of authenticity.

WHO IS THE IDEAL AUDIENCE FOR THE PLAY?

It was originally commissioned by Center Theatre Group, so I wanted it to appeal to an audience that looks like Los Angeles, and now D.C. It's dealing with issues of race identity and the complicated world of nonprofit funding in general, which affects a broad cross section of folks.

WHAT'S BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN CRAFTING IT?

When you go to the extremes of farce, the furthest end of a concept, scary things show up—questions I don't know the answer to or even want to think about.

WHAT'S A PIECE OF ADVICE FROM A MENTOR THAT HAS STUCK WITH YOU?

My directing partner in this project, Michael John Garcés, once said to me, "The best gift you can give me as a director is to not figure everything out." I am carrying that with me very strongly on this piece. He probably regrets that now.

WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST THEATRICAL MEMORY?

The Christmas Eve program at church. Compelling story. Cool lighting. Music. A chorus of voices. They tell me that, at age 2, I escaped my mother's grasp and joined the program with the bigger kids, winging it. I basically feel the same on every project since.

WHAT'S A PIECE OF ART YOU LOVE THAT YOU FEEL DOESN'T GET TALKED ABOUT ENOUGH?

Don't get me started on the divide between community-engaged theatre and traditional Western theatre. People love to talk about the work I do in Native communities as something else, separate from my other work onstage. This is an endless frustration for many community-engaged theatre companies and artists.

WHAT'S A PIECE OF ART YOU WISH YOU COULD HAVE EITHER CREATED OR BEEN A PART OF?

The *Lost Boys* musical that's now in development. I was a massive fan as a teen. I know the entire movie word for word. I dressed like Star. When I got on Broadway and got a chance to pitch to Warner Brothers, I told them it was my dream project. But I was too late. I told the director, Michael Arden, that if his fancy book writers get too busy to finish, I am ready. No one has called yet.

WHAT'S A RECENT MOMENT THAT REMINDED YOU WHY YOU DO THEATRE?

I spent a lot of time with my new version of *Peter Pan* on the West Coast this summer. You wanna remember why you do theatre? Do a show full of audiences who have never been to theatre before. Hearing gasps and cheers at the magic of theatre—it's incredible and addictive.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?

There is a tree near me right now that is over 400 years old. It reminds me of how long time is and how much can be accomplished through stillness. In my hardest times, that tree gives me a lot of hope.

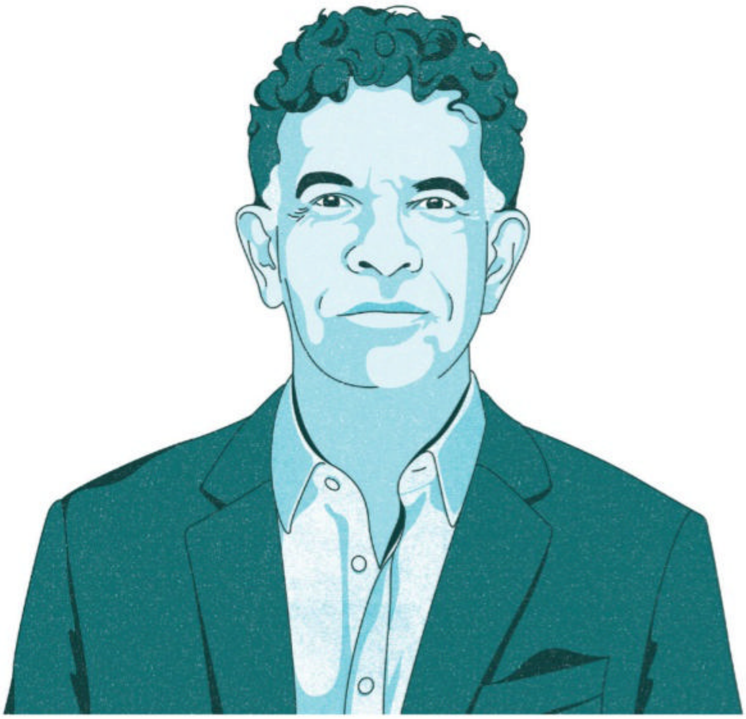
WHAT IS THE "NOTE" OR PIECE OF FEEDBACK YOU GET MOST OFTEN?

For me: Talk slower. For my work: "I didn't understand it on the page, but once I saw it, I got it."

FINISH THIS SENTENCE: IT'S NOT THEATRE UNLESS...

It is live, human to human in one space, sharing breath and time together. •

Illustrations by MUTI



BRIAN STOKES MITCHELL

*The Tony-winning actor and singer (*Ragtime, Kiss Me, Kate, King Hedley II*) will next star in the new historical musical* 3 Summers of Lincoln *at La Jolla Playhouse (Feb. 18-March 23).*

WHAT'S THE ELEVATOR PITCH FOR *3 SUMMERS OF LINCOLN*?

It's about Abraham Lincoln as he struggles to end the Civil War, when a meeting with his loudest and fiercest critic, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, changes history. What I love about the show is that it's about what's happening in our country right now: the divisiveness, the mistrust, the misinformation, the ego vs. the good of the country.

HOW DOES THE MUSIC FIT INTO THAT?

Crystal Monee Hall is the composer, and her score doesn't sound like anything I've ever heard. She can write in all kinds of different styles: something funky and down, something heartfelt and soaring. And she's a Black woman; we don't hear that voice often on Broadway.

IS LINCOLN A ROLE YOU EVER IMAGINED FOR YOURSELF?

It's funny, as people have heard that I'm doing this, they say, "Oh, my God, that's a great choice. You remind me of him." I cannot believe it when people say that! I think it's because of my charitable work, and the way I try to represent myself to the public. The more I read about him, I feel a great kinship and a deep love for him—like, this was an incredibly unusual human being on the planet.

WHAT MENTOR OR TEACHER TAUGHT YOU THE MOST ABOUT WHAT YOU DO, AND WHAT DID THEY TEACH YOU?

One reason I'm excited about doing the show at La Jolla Playhouse is that I consider San Diego my theatrical home. I started acting at the San Diego Junior Theatre, which was run by Don and Bonnie Ward; I call them my theatre parents. They cast me in my first musical, as Conrad Birdie in *Bye Bye Birdie*. They gave me my foundation on how to be excellent; they gave me my work ethic. And Bonnie taught me to tap dance. I wouldn't have done *Jelly's Last Jam* without that.

WHAT'S A PIECE OF ART YOU LOVE THAT YOU FEEL DOESN'T GET TALKED ABOUT ENOUGH?

This is one of my favorite questions. Here's what I think art is: everything that is beautiful that is not nature. Without art, we would be living in cinderblock houses, and there would be no art on the wall. Your car was designed by an artist. The clothes you are wearing were made by artists. And music that was previously only available to kings and emperors, we have at the tips of our ears. Art is so much around us that we take it for granted. People think, *Oh, art is just the works of dead people hanging in museums*. No, it's everything around us—it's the angels in the architecture, as Paul Simon said.

WHAT'S A RECENT MOMENT THAT REMINDED YOU WHY YOU DO THEATRE?

The fight scene in *The Outsiders* on Broadway. I'm getting chills just thinking about it. It was so beautifully done, and in a way that can only be done live. To sit in an audience and feel an audience all being awed by the same thing—that's why we go to the theatre.

WHAT MUSIC ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

I'm terribly addicted, as most musicians are, to Jacob Collier. He's kind of like Savion Glover, taking the knowledge of all the old-school guys and turning that into something new.

IF YOU WEREN'T A PERFORMER, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

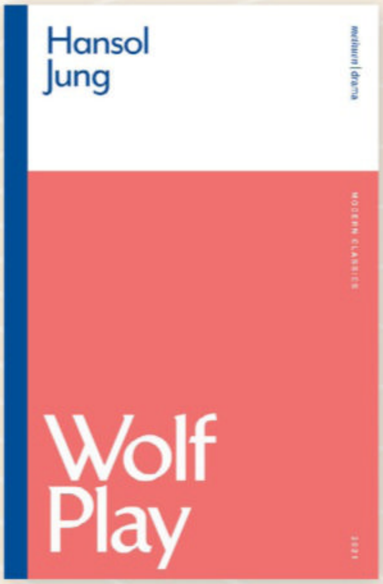
I'd be a theoretical physicist. I don't think it's really that far from what artists do.

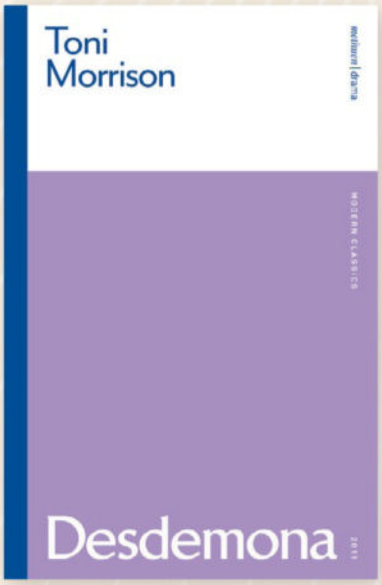
FINISH THIS SENTENCE: IT'S NOT THEATRE UNLESS...

It's bespoke entertainment happening only in the now and the here. It will never be repeated again. •

New Books from

methuen | drama

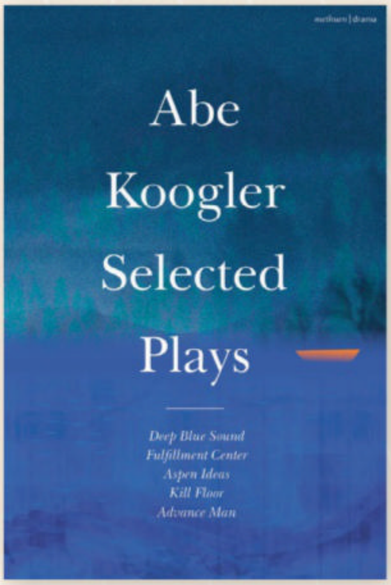

Hansol Jung
methuen | drama
MODERN CLASSICS
Wolf Play


Toni Morrison
methuen | drama
MODERN CLASSICS
Desdemona

methuen | drama
Jocelyn Bioh
THREE PLAYS
MERRY WIVES | NOLLYWOOD DREAMS
SCHOOL GIRLS; OR THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY

methuen | drama
REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN
A LAUREN GUNDERSON PLAY COLLECTION
EDITED BY JULIE FELISE DUBINER
THE REVOLUTIONISTS
SILENT SKY
NATURAL SHOCKS

methuen | drama
THE ROOMMATE
JEN SILVERMAN


methuen | drama
Abe Koogler
Selected Plays
Deep Blue Sound
Fulfillment Center
Aspen Ideas
Kill Floor
Advance Man

methuen | drama
TODD ALMOND
SLOW TRAIN COMING
Bob Dylan's Girl from the North Country and Broadway's Rebirth
THEATER

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
NO. 3
IN THE WORLD
The Hollywood Reporter,
Top Drama Schools
MAKE A SCENE
BRING YOUR CREATIVE VISION TO LIFE AT
ONE OF THE NATION'S TOP DRAMA SCHOOLS.
DANCE DESIGN & PRODUCTION DRAMA FILMMAKING MUSIC
UNCSA.EDU/DRAMA

“Twelfth Night, or What You Will,” 2024; (L-R) Harvaniya Krishnan (B.F.A. ‘24), Miranda De Faria (B.F.A. ‘25), Kaylee Hendry (B.F.A.‘25)

Illustration by MUTI

Unfinished BUSINESS

Theatre students, taught to do the job, deserve to learn more about how to get the job. *By* **ROSIE BROWNLOW-CALKIN**

One day in a theatre class, my college's technical director projected some bleak employment stats from Actors' Equity on the wall and explained that life in the business would be tough.

This was about it, in terms of professional preparation, for me and my classmates earning a theatre degree at my undergraduate institution. It was eerily reminiscent of the religion teacher's STD slideshow at my Catholic girls' school. In both cases the message was clear: Fair warning, enter at your own risk, our hands are clean.

Thankfully, things seem to be changing. The strong consensus from several current and former educators and recently graduated students I spoke to for this article was that undergraduate theatre training programs have a moral imperative to prepare students for the profession, not simply teach them to be good at what they do. (Only one, my own 82-year-old former professor, disagreed; if you're reading this, Nancy, I love you, but the times, they are a-changin'.)

To be fair, the business used to be much simpler. R. Michael Gros, theatre multihyphenate and professor emeritus at Santa Barbara City College, remembers that, despite learning virtually nothing about the industry as a student at UCLA and UC Irvine in the '70s and '80s, he was able to score a technical director gig at the now celebrated Shakespeare Santa Cruz shortly after graduation when he noticed a newspaper item about a new theatre company while visiting a friend in Santa Cruz—then slipped a note under the artistic director's door.

In 2024, this reads as fantasy. In the '80s, of course, no one had to know how to shoot a self-tape or build a website. Meanwhile, the real-world pitfalls of postgrad life have multiplied since then: In 2016, ProPublica profiled an apartment building on New York City's Lower East Side whose rents had increased nearly ninefold since 1994, an outcome which was apparently not unusual. And student loans have skyrocketed in the past few decades, up 42 percent just in the last 10 years.

It's not only students who find themselves in an ever more precarious financial position. Sonya Cooke, assistant professor of acting at Louisiana State in Baton Rouge, sees career prep as an existential necessity for her department.

"Higher education is at risk," Cooke said. "Our legitimacy is being questioned and threatened by state budgets, and if we do not show that we help people get into the workforce, we make it easy for state institutions to reduce the funding." Recognizing the current landscape, Gros made the decision to include, formally or informally, industry prep for his own students. "The idea of not training students to go out in the world is terrible," Gros said. "I have seen significant change. I think that the environment has changed for the positive over many years."

The professors I spoke with are part of this sea change; they recognize the need and have the desire to help students go out into the world. On the question of how best to do this, I found broad agreement: Join the 21st century, connect students to decision-makers, and offer career prep and a robust production season as part of the curriculum. How to achieve these ends, given the institutional, cultural, and financial hurdles? These answers are much less evident.

21st-Century Tools

Many of our departments are labeled "Theatre," which hides the ball a bit. In fact, we are largely training people not to do theatre but to do things—act, direct, write, stage manage, design, run a shop, hang lights—that can be done inside or outside a theatre space. Increasingly, today's artists are using 21st-century tools like self-tapes and digital portfolios to secure employment in film, TV, new media, immersive events, and the corporate world, alongside theatre work. Yet many departments don't have any classes geared specifically for working on camera, and, among universities that have both film and theatre majors, there is often no interaction between the two departments.

Even when schools do offer camera-based classes, they aren't always up to date. Matt Koenig, now assistant professor of acting at Baldwin Wallace in Columbus, Ohio, recalled a "camera class" he took: "We got a handwritten call sheet and were told, 'That is what you're going to receive every time you go on set.' I had just done my first movie, and I went, 'Handwritten? What? No.'"

There are signs of change. At the American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA), which only offers performance-based degrees, all students leave with a reel and professional headshots. Louisiana State recently implemented a BFA in film and an optional camera track for its acting degree, both housed within the theatre department, and they produce two to four "departmental films" every year, alongside a season of plays. Tyler Kieffer, assistant professor of sound design at LSU, uses the multiplicity of his profession as the cornerstone of his teaching philosophy. The uncertainty in the industry, he said, is forcing students to look at other career avenues "that might not be in a building with four walls with stage lights." His takeaway: "I'm trying to prepare students for how to be better listeners and recognize where they can use the power of sound in whatever avenue they're trying to pursue."

For many students and faculty, 21st-century industry training also means modeling new ways of working rather than reinforcing archaic and harmful practices. The past 10 years have seen the advent of #MeToo, intimacy coordination, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and a labor-based awakening in the industry demanding living wages and a healthy work-life balance, not to mention diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Addie Barnhart, assistant professor of theatre of Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, noted that training in intimacy coordination can be undertaken online, so professors everywhere have no excuse for dismissing it.

"These practices are the way of the future, because it's consent-based work, and those tools are integral in this industry regardless of what your role is," she said. The training she mentions is not free, but Sonya Cooke of LSU proposed that one way to "fix the problem is for administrations to fund additional education." While there is a general sense among students and faculty that programs lag behind the industry in preparing students to work in camera-based mediums, the academy seems to be ahead on practices around gender, race, class, and consent. A colleague who recently returned from a national Equity tour told me that, perhaps because of activism-minded Gen Z students, undergraduate programs are generally more attuned to 21st-century social and labor issues than the industry is.

Work Begets Work

Programs should also help to introduce students to decision-makers. This can mean bringing in guest artists for master classes or for stints in a school's production season, running an actor showcase, or arranging on-campus auditions and interviews. Stage manager Sloane Fischer's lived experience is proof. "I don't get jobs through Playbill or submitting a résumé. It's all been through connections—through someone that knew someone that knew someone," she said.

Pace University in Pleasantville, New York, where Fischer graduated in 2022 with a BFA in stage management, hired outside directors. One director she worked with during her junior year, she said, helped her get jobs after graduation, and "actually led me to a lot of connections to the people I work with now." On the opposite coast, Cal Poly Pomona's guest artist program yielded similar dividends for Ariana Michel, a 2022 grad with a BA in theatre design and technical production, who said, "The first show that I was a PSM for, that director really helped me launch my career in L.A."

At LSU, Cooke has instituted an actor showcase in New Orleans, a market small enough for local casting directors and agents to take

Dell'Arte International
a home for
socially engaged
cutting edge
physical theater training
and a laboratory of new works
dellarte.com
Blue Lake, CA

notice of her crop of graduates. "My goal is a 100 percent success rate for students to get meetings," she said. "At every showcase I've done, we've met that goal." Indeed, many professors lamented the "New York or bust" mentality pervasive among many college students and some faculty, because artists can obtain (and sometimes work) big-city jobs from anywhere thanks to Zoom, and because New York, L.A., and Chicago are over-saturated with recent grads hoping for their big break.

Still, there's no getting around the fact that this is an industry with abysmal employment outcomes, and schools are graduating far more BAs and BFAs in theatre than there are good jobs, especially for performers, directors, designers, and playwrights. As one AMDA adjunct put it bluntly, "Am I pimping their dreams? I'm doing everything I can to be really supportive and give them all the tools, and nurture their dreams, but also it feels like I'm sending them out to be eaten by wolves."

Hands-On Know-How

Okay, I take back what I said at the top: My undergrad program *did* have an ace in the hole. We produced an 8- to 10-play mainstage season, with plenty of opportunities for student-produced work (the season has recently drastically downsized, much to alums' chagrin). I can say with confidence that the 12 college plays on my résumé made me attractive to internship and graduate programs and made me a far more capable and well-rounded performer.

Cade Sikora, assistant teaching professor in scenic design at Ball State in Muncie, Indiana, agreed with this emphasis. "From a design and tech perspective," Sikora said, "it is so important that students have that practical, hands-on experience of actually doing the thing, designing or building or what have you, in a shop with professionals."

At Creighton, professors see the production season as a bridge between the classroom and the profession. "We teach the theory and then they get a chance to practice in the classroom, and then they get basically a sandbox or a lab through our four productions to take these lessons and put them into real time," said Lora Kaup, who's on the school's full-time costume design faculty.

Of course, a lack of money sometimes gets in the way. One professor of playwriting at a research university in the rural South, who asked to remain anonymous, reported that the total production budget for next season has been set at $8,000 for four titles. "How do you train people how to build a set for a musical or sing in a musical if you can't afford to do a musical?" she wondered.

In addition to strong production calendars, career-oriented classes are seen by students and faculty as essential curricular features for programs that take industry prep seriously. "If I hadn't had my Working Artist class in undergrad with 14 of us, I wouldn't have known how to make a résumé to get me out of west central Wisconsin," said Sikora.

A single course on this subject, though, can seem like a crash course, with so much information thrown at students that it's difficult to take any of it in. "It would have been nice to explore those

WELLESLEY
W
Come play with us!

the next stage

THEATRE EDUCATION AT A WORLD-CLASS INSTITUTION

Wellesley College offers a powerful and unique education to students seeking a BA in Theatre Studies. The diverse and dedicated faculty includes nationally-engaged playwrights, directors, designers, producers, and working actors. Our award-winning students are given both support and autonomy in a vibrant community of majors and makers. This all takes place on the campus of one of America's most accomplished and respected liberal arts colleges.

concepts more fully," said Joseph Antonio, a 2024 acting grad of PCPA Pacific Conservatory Theater in Santa Maria, California, and a current emerging professional resident at Milwaukee Rep. "It's challenging to get a lot of information from a single class period, especially if we go off the rails chatting about something else, and then we've lost our hour and a half."

Ariana Michel, the stage management grad from Cal Poly, offered a solution echoed by several others: "Maybe it's like an introductory and an advanced—something you're introduced to very early on, then a circle-back moment."

Professors I spoke to liked this idea, but predictably mentioned barriers to offering additional classes. Sikora said he knows of several colleagues at other institutions who have seen career prep classes cut entirely or rendered so general as to be useless, because they weren't enrolling enough students or because the classes are "perceived by the college, the school or the university or the state or whatever, as over-specialization."

Professors sometimes offer to close the knowledge gap by adding individualized tutorials to their teaching loads. The rural playwriting professor did this, but felt conflicted about it: "Then you end up teaching an independent study to two students who want some very specific skills, but not getting paid for that extra work."

Some caution that too much emphasis on career only furthers the commodification of performers. Said Molly Dobbs, a resident artist and faculty member at PCPA, "Friends in other programs feel they're being trained to be a product," referring to some programs' hyper-focus on branding, typing, and the conservatory-to-Broadway pipeline as the only worthwhile path through the industry. Dobbs, who attended undergraduate and masters programs in the U.K., thinks this may be a uniquely American conundrum. "Everything becomes a little bit corporate, a little bit, 'How can I package this know that it will give back to us?' "

Creighton's Kaup agrees to an extent but views branding as a 21st-century necessity that can be used for good if taught in the right way. "Why are we uncomfortable with branding?" she wondered. "Is it really the branding itself, or is it the language around it and the way in which branding is being used? Where is this preconceived notion of it that we don't see it as a tool?"

Personnel Best

Again and again, I heard students and faculty say we need more working professionals in the classroom.

"I think you have to have faculty that are actively athletic," said Linda Bisesti, the recently retired head of acting at Cal Poly Pomona. "If an acting teacher isn't auditioning, it's hard for me to believe that they have that muscle really alive in their body." Matt Koenig at Baldwin Wallace said that his busy performance schedule leads to industry connections he can convert into jobs for his students. "If I know an artistic director very well and they really like me," he said, "it's more likely that they are going to trust my word to say, 'Hey, you should come and audition my students.'"

Hiring a slate of faculty who are active professionals is easier said than done. One difficulty is the nationwide gutting of university arts programs since the recession, and even more drastically since the pandemic. "We've all been downsized as programs," said Creighton's Addie Barnhart. "I'm seeing so many positions being terminated and not replaced, or things going from tenure track to instructor level."

Several complained of faculty who stay complacent and stay put when they shouldn't, exacerbating this personnel crisis by preventing new hires. "We are still seeing a lot of people in jobs who have atrophied in their practice," said Barnhart. "They have become really comfortable in their classrooms and are holding onto their jobs because retirement is hard, and job security is really useful."

Wage pressures have also thinned out technical teaching staffs. As Ball State's Cade Sikora put it, "Since 2020, a lot of skilled technicians have gone to adjacent fields—interior design, construction, drafting—and stayed there" for the higher pay. The rural playwriting professor recalled that a technical director candidate "turned down a position because he said he wanted to make more than a high school teacher, and we don't pay more than a high school teacher."

Mrs. Bave Presents
THE PIG WAR
by Steve Lyons
The almost true story of a play that nearly happened about a war that never occurred.
"As told by the mannequins who were there."
Free Scripts
EVERGREEN PLAYS
www.EvergreenPlays.com

Many teaching positions exist within theatre deserts—places where professional opportunities are scarce—or don't include creative activity in the job description, either because the institution is focused exclusively on teaching or because more full-time faculty are being hired outside of the tenure system. These hires are generally expected to teach more classes, and there is no expectation or compensation for engaging in the profession.

One possible solution to the faculty-as-working-professionals problem? Adjunctify your department. Professors who are only teaching one or two classes in large markets have ample opportunity to work professionally, after all, and institutions like AMDA and Pace use this as a selling point for their programs. As a student, though, Sloane Fischer has mixed feelings about the model. "It was a very cool experience to have working industry folks be our professors," she recalled, "but sometimes they couldn't give their all because their attention was split, which we understood, but it's also, like, we're paying $70,000 a year."

An AMDA adjunct I spoke with was similarly ambivalent: "The downside is that because there are so many adjunct faculty members, the education is really hit or miss. I think it's whatever the students make of it, and it's also whatever teachers they happen to get," adding that students at large state schools perhaps unwittingly sign up for something similar, as they are usually taught by grad students for their first year or two.

One Pace adjunct I spoke to was adamant about giving their all to their students, but saw a downside. "Maybe I am operating like a full-time faculty, but I suppose I'm not paid that way," they said. (Tellingly, both adjunct faculty members I spoke to for this article chose to remain anonymous.)

Continuing Education

The professors I spoke with genuinely care about their students and are keenly aware of the industry's challenges. Addie Barnhart expressed a view I share deeply: that a professor should continue to make themselves available to mentor students after graduation. In a way, students need us most after they have flown the nest, when they are actually living the life they've been preparing for. *Should I work for this company? Is what my boss just did normal? Help—I don't know if I want to do this anymore!* These are matters we can't advise on in the classroom.

So many talented people who graduate with big dreams flame out fast, in some cases before going to a single audition or interview. I'm convinced that a lot of this heartbreak would be avoided if students felt like they could text their college mentors without burdening them.

"If you can come back to me and I can support you, then you're also feeling empowered by your degree," said Barnhart. "I love that my students stay in touch with me and still utilize me as a sounding board, because it demonstrates to me that I'm doing something right. Shutting that down just perpetuates gatekeeping to me. That's what we're trying to work away from in this industry. So why not provide an open door?"

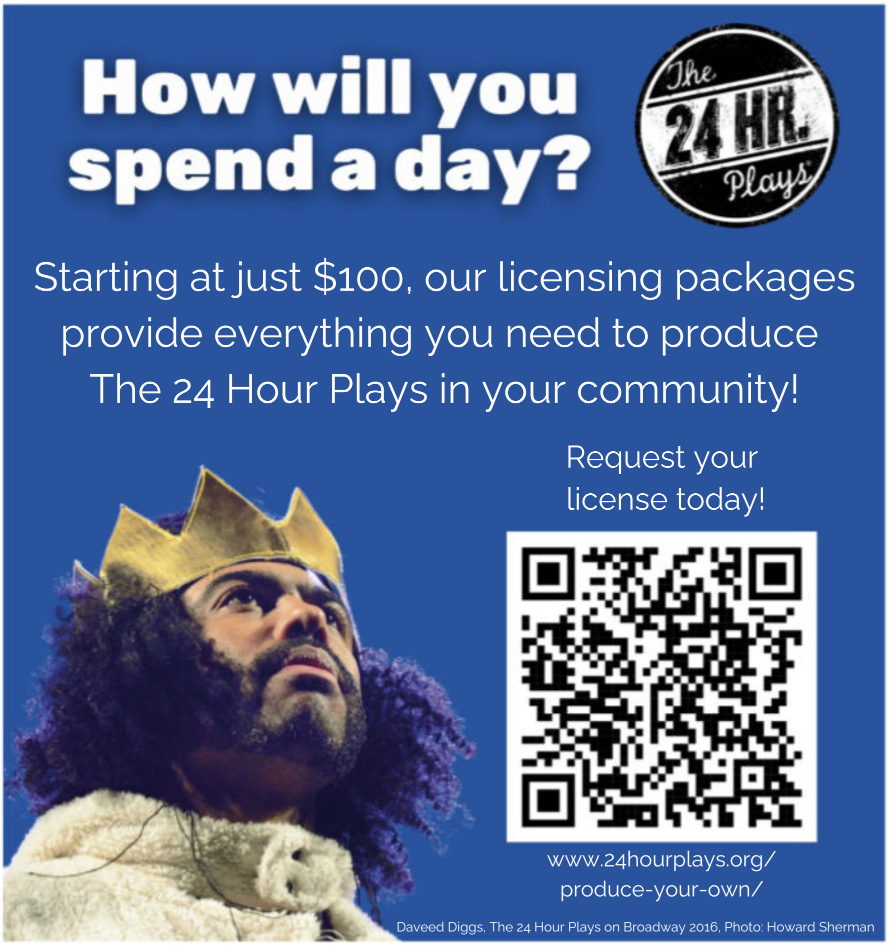
I had a gnawing feeling something was missing from this article—an answer I was scared to ask for, but that I knew was needed. So I called up Alyssa, a 2023 graduate from the University of Nevada, Reno, where I teach, who had been my Nina in *Stupid Fucking Bird*, Aaron Posner's riff on *The Seagull*. On the phone with Alyssa, I thought about Nina: at first wildly naïve, optimistic, and in love with theatre, then utterly broken by life, by the business, and by an adult she trusted. I thought about Nina's line, from the Chekhov original, that she "would live in a garret" to be an actor, a line I wholeheartedly latched onto as an undergraduate despite not knowing the meaning of the word "garret."

How had I done? I wanted to know. Had I prepared her for life outside the academic cocoon?

Alyssa took a beat. "You guys did what you could with the time that you had. I feel like, could it have gone further? Sure. But I still feel like I got what I needed from that time."

I'll take it, for now.

Rosie Brownlow-Calkin enjoyed every second of her training at Whitman College, LAMDA, and UC Irvine, and has taught brilliant students at Stella Adler, PCPA, Stephen F. Austin State University, and the University of Nevada. This article is for them.



How will you spend a day?

The 24 HR. Plays

Starting at just $100, our licensing packages provide everything you need to produce The 24 Hour Plays in your community!

Request your license today!

www.24hourplays.org/produce-your-own/

Daveed Diggs, The 24 Hour Plays on Broadway 2016, Photo: Howard Sherman

Illustration by MUTI

Teaching THE MOMENT

A roundtable with educators about the challenges of the day and preparing for what's ahead.

By **JACQUELINE E. LAWTON**

Last fall I co-wrote an article for HowlRound Theatre Commons about the impact of university closures, reductions, and mergers during the 2023-24 academic year. I was concerned by what I learned. When the global pandemic hit in 2020, many colleges had not yet recovered from the funding dip that followed the 2008 financial crisis. Coming out of the pandemic lockdown, universities have grappled with declining enrollment and rising operational costs, and administrators have implemented cost-saving measures, including staff and faculty layoffs, early retirements, and course reductions. These measures have disproportionately impacted drama departments across the country.

Invited by *American Theatre* magazine to continue the conversation, I wanted to learn how colleagues were working to address the cutbacks and constraints, while continuing to teach the next generation of theatre professionals. Given our highly contentious political environment, I was also curious about the impact political forces and the pushback on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives may have on curriculum and programming.

The conversation left me feeling hopeful. The five extraordinary theatre professionals and educators I spoke to were Keith Arthur Bolden (he/him), a film, stage, and television actor and an associate professor at Spelman College; Omiyẹmi (Artisia) Green (she/her), a director, dramaturg, historian, and professor of theatre and Africana studies at William & Mary; Valerie Curtis-Newton (she/her), a director, playwright, and professor and head of directing and playwriting at the University of Washington; Lisa Portes (she/her), a director and professor and chair of the department of theatre and dance at the University of California San Diego; and Tamilla Woodard (she/her), a director, artistic director, and professor and chair of the acting program at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale. Following are excerpts from our conversation.

JACQUELINE E. LAWTON: Politics impact who we are as individuals, artists, and educators. I'd like to start here. What is one of your earliest memories of politics, and how did it shape you?

KEITH ARTHUR BOLDEN: My mother was an office manager for the probation department of L.A. County. She worked with the mayor of Inglewood; he was also a probation officer. He was paid as a part-time employee as the mayor of the city. It was then that I realized that you don't always get paid to serve, that you show up to serve, and that you can have a career in something that pays you and still do something you're passionate about that doesn't pay you. That's kind of how I've been living my life. I do the thing I need to do so I can do what I want to do.

OMIYẸMI GREEN: Between the ages of 10 and 12, a series of events shaped my growing political awareness. Almost every example I can give from that period falls around this idea of the power of perception and how Black people were perceived by white folks. Having historically been one of a few or the only Black individual in predominantly white spaces, I am always thinking about representations of Blackness and the politics of our imaging. Those two years of my youth played a formative role in my current work as an African American theatre historian, director, and dramaturg.

LISA PORTES: My father is Cuban American and an academic. My mother is a white Air Force brat from Nebraska. I remember I wore

Keith Arthur Bolden

Valerie Curtis-Newton

Omiyẹmi Green

Lisa Portes

Tamilla Woodard

these gold sandals from Brazil to school and got called "the jigaboo with the gold-plated shoes." There were parents who wouldn't let their kids play with me because my dad was divorced and swarthy. It was my first awareness of being othered. It was shocking, because that wasn't the world I'd grown up in. Even if my military family might have been more conservative, there was great worldliness. The conversations we were having around the table were about the complexity of the United States. I have an affinity for projects that look at what it means to walk through the world and find your place in the world. That is the American experiment, right? How are we all here together? How do we share space? How do we share stories?

TAMILLA WOODARD: I'm from Houston. When Sheila Jackson Lee ran for Houston City Council in 1989, it was an enormous deal; my understanding is that, at the time, there had not been a Black woman on the council. Watching her work was so profound for me, and seeing how much of an advocate she was for her community was just incredible. She's just a beautiful, loudmouth, troublemaking woman. I thought she was amazing.

VALERIE CURTIS-NEWTON: I was 14, and I was failing gym. I was a very athletic child; I was successful in all the sports. My father went to school to find out why I was failing gym class. I had a young white teacher. She said that I had a bad attitude about losing, that I would get angry, and that the goal was for me to get better at losing. My father stood up for me; he said, "I don't want you imposing your white middle-class values on my daughter. She's got to go through the world, striving for the best, expecting to win and not just get with the program." After that, I felt better about the times I would be misunderstood or evaluated by somebody else's scale. I learned that I had to decide what my definition of success is. I had to decide what is truly my best effort and let my best effort be good enough.

Has the current political landscape impacted your teaching or curriculum in any way?

VALERIE: For undergraduates, there's a lot more concern about identity and language. For my graduate students, it's a lot more about the existential situation that the field is in now and whether we are training them for it. If we're not training them for a regional system of well-made plays, what are we training them for? There is a big evolution in our department toward generative work and devised work as foundational to teaching actors, directors, designers, and PhDs. We've hired a lot of new faculty and have managed to reach a consensus agreement that generative work is an essential element for the future.

OMIYẸMI: My response is to turn my attention toward the future. Recently, I attended two public meetings of the William & Mary Board of Visitors where several visionary questions were asked. My current project, the Art & Science Exchange, is but one contribution to what will be a collective institutional response to these questions. One of the objectives of ASE is to encourage synergies between art and science that advance university priorities in raising awareness of and addressing critical local, national, and global issues. Through ASE, researchers across the campus and potentially across the globe can come together to generate new work for the public good.

> **"It's important for students to leave here understanding their job is to be of use to humanity."**

LISA: I've been very lucky that at both UCSD and at DePaul University, where I worked before, we have been able to continue to teach our students, who are artists, how to think, create, and envision from whatever political point of view they may come from. What can be challenging, as a teacher, is remaining politically neutral in the classroom, because you can't help but think that part of your job is to have a point of view. But remaining neutral is crucial for every student to feel that they are safe—that they could be heard and can create in that classroom.

TAMILLA: We have a significant number of students who are international or share international identities. The world impacts the classroom. We also have students from all over the country. What is happening where their families are located impacts the classroom. Their ability to leave something at the door is limited, because the world is feeding their art as much as anything else. They're deeply empathetic beings. That's the art form. And the students know they're privileged—it's a selective program. In our conversations, I talk about elevating the role of the artist in society as a necessity for our own civilization, for our own growth and humanity. It's important for students to leave here understanding that their job is to be of use to humanity, to our souls. That's the job, and it's deeply political.

KEITH: I mean, she said it all. I was meant to do this: to show up in spaces to show, especially as a heterosexual man in theatre, what it looks like to be inclusionary; what it looks like to be an empath and not to judge; what it looks like to create opportunities for people you may not agree with; what it looks like to forgive in the moment; what it looks like to stay in that moment and be uncomfortable until you are comfortable; what it looks like to be this physical actor, as most Black men are looked at for their physical prowess. In my curriculum, I use my personal stories and experience to excavate and dig for where the human lies in that story, and find where you intersect with that human.

When you started at your jobs, what was most challenging or surprising about it? What is most rewarding about it now?

KEITH: When I first got here, the biggest challenge was feeling that I had to prove myself. I was hired as a tenure track professor, but that wasn't enough—my résumé and my journey weren't enough. I had to prove myself. The most rewarding thing has been creating opportunities for students and for my colleagues. As a professional director, I've hired everybody in my department for a job.

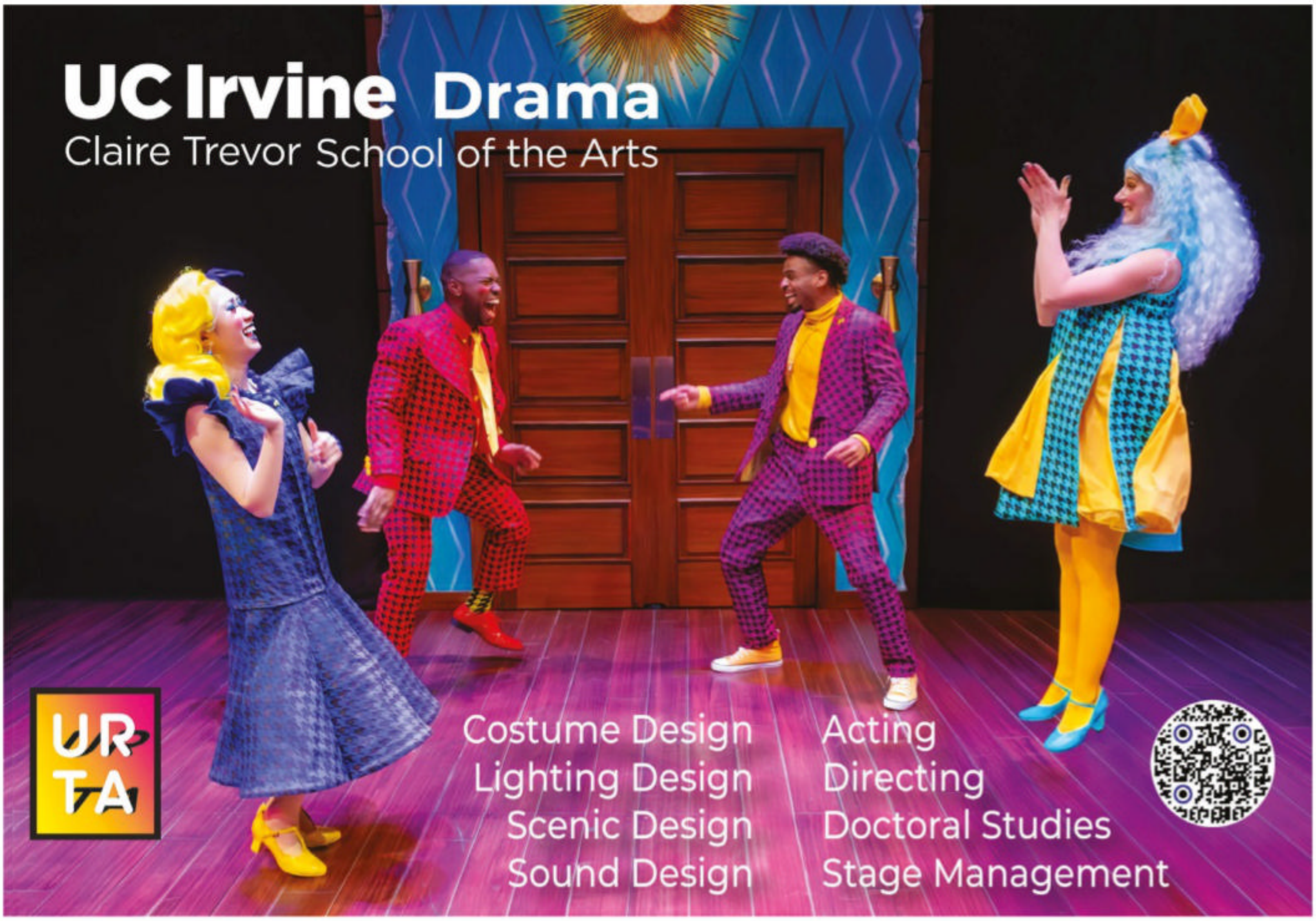
LISA: At DePaul, the biggest challenge was that there had been an entrenched way that the School of Theatre operated and saw itself. The dean who hired me was starting to envision how we would move into the next moment. Sitting at the apex of that change was challenging; it was also tremendously fulfilling. We really professionalized that program. We were graduating the leaders of the future. In my current chair position at UCSD, the department of theatre and dance had been through a rocky time. The faculty had to figure out how to work within the current resources and distribute them in such a way that we could still train to the excellence that we train at UCSD. There has been a new level set, and now we're rebuilding. That is very exciting.

VALERIE: There were no people of color on the faculty when I got there as a graduate student—not one. My first three projects were Black plays, and the head of the directing area said to me, "I understand the work you love, but I just need you to know that you don't have to do that work anymore. Maybe you should do another kind of play." I was like, "You're telling me not to do the thing I love? Don't tell me that. Tell me what skills you want me to get, and I will find material that resonates with me to get it." Ultimately, we agreed that what was important was the skills, not so much the material. I was grateful that at the time I was there, I was allowed to do that and they mostly got out of my way. Now what I try to teach my students is how to show up as themselves and to have integrity and to not be afraid.

OMIYẸMI: One of my colleagues said something like what Valerie heard, i.e., "You don't have to direct the Black play." There were also attempts to exclude me from the mainstage season. So I started publishing. By the time I came up for promotion, I had published more than I had directed. It was rewarding to see how I had circumvented the system in a way that folks were not expecting. Because I'm going to show up in this space 125 percent who I am, right? Either people will embrace it, accept it, and make room for me, or they won't. But let me tell you, nobody makes an enemy of water. That's what my name means. Water befits me. Water always knows its direction. And just like water, we find ways, as Black people, to work in these systems and within these predominantly or historically white contexts.

TAMILLA: The thing that was the most surprising was that there are a lot of brown folks here. There had already been a lot of conscious work done to have the program reflect the country. The invitation is very open. We're going to see everybody who applies. The requirement is simply talent and that you feel something in yourself that cannot be answered on your own—that you know yourself to be an artist. That you're willing to grapple with your humanity and your talent at the same time. That was here when I came. All I did was bring my ethos: You feed the human and the artist will grow.

Jacqueline E. Lawton is a playwright and advocate for access, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the American theatre. She is currently an associate professor in the department of dramatic art at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and a production dramaturg for PlayMakers Repertory Company.



UC Irvine Drama
Claire Trevor School of the Arts

Costume Design
Lighting Design
Scenic Design
Sound Design

Acting
Directing
Doctoral Studies
Stage Management

Illustration by MUTI

Taken to SCHOOL

At high school theatre programs big and small, well funded and not, educators are stoking excitement and building a future, both for their students and for the art form.

By **DAVID JOHN CHÁVEZ**

The second show I ever directed as a high school drama teacher was *The Diary of Anne Frank*. It was a bold choice, though born more of ignorance than audacity. The material would challenge even a veteran drama teacher; in spring 1998, I was a first-year public educator.

Fortunately, I had a gifted actor for Anne. But I cast this show when my "educating through a crisis" filing cabinet was quite bare. While the girl playing Anne's sister, Margot, was a kind, soft-spoken junior whom I will call Sarah, I was shaken when one of Sarah's teachers approached me after hearing she had been cast, exclaiming, "I was so happy for her. I wonder how auditions went for her, since she can't read?"

Hmm. I somehow missed that tiny detail.

My panic level reached stratospheric heights. What now? How much time would I need to prepare Sarah, apart from the rest of the cast, and would this split focus affect the show? Did I just set her up to fail? Did I have other bankable skills in case of a necessary career shift?

As time went on, I learned this was a huge deal—but not for me. Sarah struggled through rehearsals and remained a bit aloof from her peers. But she just needed time to warm. As days passed, Sarah's confidence level steadied, then soared, until she finally nailed down the few lines she had. Her ability to settle into the more easily forgotten Frank sister had a muted brilliance.

Opening night finally arrived. A special present that took eight weeks to wrap was now ready to be opened. If we had done our job, shock and tears awaited parents who may have wondered why the hell their kids had to be at the theatre so much. For her part, Sarah accomplished the thing that had never been guaranteed. When the performance ended and the company dashed to the lobby to meet their adoring public, Sarah sought out her mom first. They both raced toward each other, embracing firmly, then sobbing uncontrollably.

Over the years, I've acquired many similar anecdotes (horror stories as well). Overcoming adversity early taught me that achieving "success" in a high school theatre program is a varied phenomenon, often based on location and socioeconomics. Affluent communities and private schools offer pathways into college and professional training programs that public schools struggle to provide. Yet many thriving public school programs are staffed by incredible teachers who've bucked those trends, often in communities that give higher priority to their sports programs.

The International Thespian Society, the only honor society for middle and high school drama students, is all about ensuring that theatre kids remain an equally high priority. Thespian, or ITS, troupes are represented at schools across the country, boasting more than 2.4 million inductions since 1929. Every year, these teens bounce to state festivals to engage in drama-paloozas, with smaller regional satellite gatherings offered elsewhere throughout the year. Performances, plays, keynote speakers, and competitions are all held under the banner of the Educational Theatre Association (EdTA), the parent organization for the ITS, with the Super Bowl of high school drama, the International Thespian Festival, held annually in the summer at Indiana University in Bloomington.

"We define a successful program as one that is fully sustainable," said Jennifer Katona, executive director of EdTA, "meaning it has been embedded into the school culture, so the administration provides the space and the resources and the budget that is needed."

Katona was part of her high school thespian troupe, taught middle school theatre in Brooklyn, and worked as a teaching artist for many organizations, including the New Victory Theater, a company on 42nd Street in New York City that focuses on young audiences. For Katona, there is no back seat for the theatre program.

"The school play's announcements are made alongside the football game announcements," Katona said. "It equals everything else at a school, embedded in the culture of the school and of the community. Anything above and beyond that is spectacular."

ON A NATIONAL LEVEL, major awards programs have become the North Star for serious high school drama kids. One of the most prestigious, the Jimmy Awards, has been given out since 2009, with household theatre names like Eva Noblezada (*Miss Saigon*,

A 2014 production of "Hairspray" at Rock Hill High School in South Carolina. (Photo by Julie Quick)

Hadestown), Reneé Rapp (*Mean Girls*), and Justin Cooley (*Kimberly Akimbo*) having gone far in the process. This year's winners, Texas native Damson Chola Jr. and Michigander Gretchen Shope, could walk onto a Broadway stage right now and get nightly standing ovations. (Want proof? Both of their hair-raising performances are available on YouTube.)

Meanwhile, on a local level, Stephanie Black Daniels aims for a different kind of star. She has taught high school drama for 32 years, changing lives through theatre at Rock Hill High School in South Carolina for the past 21. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, her school's minority enrollment is 57 percent, with 55 percent of the students considered economically disadvantaged. The bright stage lights in her theatre are no competition for Friday night lights, the American South being a bastion of gridiron glory. Many of her students did not grow up with live theatre in their lives until they met Daniels, who exudes Southern charm and gentle charisma.

Daniels has spent many years making sure special experiences are what her students have in her corner of the campus. It's work that isn't always met with a great box office return, which can

17 May 2025 · 12-5pm · we invite alumni and friends to

celebrate **50**

honoring 50 years training actors and directors to their full artistic potential

performance of *Play On Shakespeare* texts by young actors

interview of SAC Founder, Joy Zinoman, by *NYTimes* critic at large Jason Zinoman

unveiling of 50th anniversary mural

a toast to alums and faculty

3423 Holmead Place, NW
Washington, DC 20017
info@**studioactingconservatory**.org

STUDIO ACTING CONSERVATORY 50

Photo by Iwan Bagus

be frustrating. Still, her troupe is a regular presence at statewide competitions, taking home top honors multiple times.

Daniels works tirelessly to ensure her troupes represent the demographics of the school itself. One of the great highlights of her career in reflecting that commitment came in 2001, when she took 15 students from her previous school in Greenwood, South Carolina, to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland.

“I had kids that had never been outside the state of South Carolina,” said Daniels, whose voice trembled and softened at the memory. “I had kids who had never been on a plane, never seen any other part of the world, and it was important to me to provide that experience.”

> **“We invite every school to come and see our children’s show…My kids feel like rock stars.”**

Closer to home, her aim is to do the best shows possible. This means ensuring that students in the area, who are often witnessing their first theatre production, have a quality experience.

“We invite every elementary school to come and see our children’s show,” Daniels said. “I announce it on a Monday, and by Tuesday afternoon, I’m usually sold out. When we bring them in, my kids love it; they feel like rock stars. When I have a student come up to me and say they saw *Alice in Wonderland* in the fifth grade, and they couldn’t wait to get to high school to take drama—I mean, that’s why you do what you do, for that right there.”

While Daniels aims high, she is under no illusion that she’s sending students off to collect their Tony Awards. Some programs, backed by higher funding and boasting successful alumni, do have students daring to dream of the neon lights on Broadway. Isabella Villasis, 18, spent much of her young career in lead roles at Children’s Musical Theater San Jose (CMTSJ), a big-budget community theatre whose boards have been trod by the likes of Alex Brightman (*School of Rock*, *Beetlejuice*), Will Brill (Tony winner for *Stereophonic*), and Isabella Esler (the recent *Beetlejuice* tour). While everyone who auditions is cast in a CMTSJ show, the true battle is over the lead roles, which come with lavalier microphones, program bios, and clout.

Villasis spent her freshman year at a public high school doing more basic plays. What she craved was a chance to experience a high school version of CMTSJ. So, with her parents’ blessing, Villasis left public school for the rigors of Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose, which offers intensive drama and academic programs.

“Mitty puts a spotlight on the performing arts, and not just theatre,” Villasis said. “The choir and dance teams are so present. Being surrounded by all that is a great chance to get more recognition and have the opportunity for awards.”

SCAN FOR AUDITION & INTERVIEW DATES

MarymountManhattan
NEW YORK CITY

THEATRE ARTS
imaginative storytellers

BFA Theatre Arts
Acting | Musical Theatre | Stage & Production Management | Theatre Design & Technology

BA Theatre Arts
Directing | Theatre & New Media | Theatre History & Performance Texts | Writing for the Stage

For more information I Theatre Arts Department I 212-774-0767 I Theatre@mmm.edu I MMC Admissions 1-800-MARYMOUNT I www.mmm.edu/theatre

Susan Cook Photography

Mitty's drama teacher is the even-keeled, soft-spoken Doug Santana, who has helmed the program for 22 years. Teaching drama at Mitty means multiple musicals, improv, sketch comedy, fundraising, and galas, as well as preparing kids for the pipeline into advanced training programs at the college level. The impressive alumni page includes performers with Broadway and film credits.

"Our program, and our shows, are competitive," said Santana, relaxing in his office the morning of opening night of Mitty's latest musical, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, last October. "Most kids who come here to do theatre know what they're getting into, and there's a lot of them doing that by choice. I think that makes them better, because they're able to really be pushed."

Mitty even offers an advanced class specifically designed to prepare students for college and professional theatre. Santana also maintained that at Mitty, previous stage experience is a plus, but not a guarantee.

"I think one misconception about us is that if you come in with 20 shows under your belt you have some sort of advantage," he said. "It's something you can build on, but we've also had many students who have found the arts later in their lives."

> **"I think that's the Trojan horse: getting kids in high school speaking the language of these contemporary writers."**

DISCOVERING THEATRE LATER is often the case for folks of color, who have historically been overlooked for leadership positions, marketing, and season selections at theatres, let alone for educational opportunities. After the murder of George Floyd and the We See You, White American Theater movement, these disparities received renewed attention.

In the 2021-22 school year, the Next Narrative Monologue Competition kicked off, aimed at centering Black professional playwrights and uplifting young theatre students of color. Inspired in part by the long-standing August Wilson Monologue Competition, Next Narrative is the brainchild of Jamil Jude, artistic director of True Colors Theatre Company in Atlanta, which hosted the Wilson competition since it was founded there, by then-artistic director Kenny Leon, in 2007. Next Narrative pairs working playwrights with high school performers, who are then mentored in their regions. Participating regions send their top two finalists to New York City, with all expenses paid. The finalists participate in workshops with theatre professionals, see a Broadway show, and perform at Harlem's historic Apollo Theatre. The top three winners also receive cash prizes.

For Jude, who grew up on the work of August Wilson and his contemporaries, Next Narrative is a way to continue that legacy by lifting up new voices to expand the American theatre canon, all while feeding a teen pipeline that will fill college programs, professional stages, and audiences well into the future.

"There are a hundred contemporary writers and only one Mr. Wilson, right?" asked Jude. "I think that's the Trojan horse: getting kids in high school speaking the language of these contemporary writers they will ultimately go out and audition for and give them a leg up, we hope. Getting that training in high school programs, and not leaving it up to the universities that unfortunately have been slow to incorporate more contemporary work in their offerings, is important."

Next Narrative makes intuitive sense, said Meg O'Brien, director of education at Boston's Huntington Theatre Company, which has been heavily involved with both monologue competitions. "These are writers in the American theatre currently, so they're also writing about what it means to be Black in America today. We are able to provide students with arts learning that provides a brave space for them just to explore who they are and how to express themselves, while also

Do you have questions about enrolling in a health plan?

We're an open book!

Entertainment Community Fund
Formerly The Actors Fund

entertainmentcommunity.org/AHIRC

The cast of a 2024 production of "The Drowsy Chaperone" at Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose, California, circling up before a dress rehearsal. (Photo by David John Chávez)

providing them the text to analyze, dig into, and improve literacy."

O'Brien started off at Huntington Theatre Company as education manager in 2008, before moving into her current role in 2017. In 2023, the Boston region saw its entrant, Sakura Rosenthal, win the national Next Narrative championship, and a $3,000 scholarship, with a piece titled *Happiness* by Rachel Lynett. In addition to highlighting and advancing young talent, the aim of NNMC is to maintain the freshness and contemporary sensibilities of today's dramatic writers, all the better to make theatre relevant to today's students.

"We have a lot of love for Shakespeare, obviously, but he's old, he's dead, he's white, he's British," O'Brien said. "For teenagers today, there's a really hard sell to get them to understand the universality of that text, just by starting out with basic history of who he was and where he lived." The other thing that excites O'Brien about NNMC is when "our students choose to pursue the arts post-high school…It's a dream and a joy."

Even competitors who don't choose the arts as a career are more likely to be lifelong theatregoers, which bodes well for the ecosystem as a whole. Writers, actors, and patrons of color are needed now more than ever, with perilous attrition in every corner of the industry. And a greater preponderance of stories by and about people of color means that trained and skilled writers and actors are needed to tell and interpret those stories.

These competitions may be audience builders in themselves. As Jude put it, "A lot of people who come to our high school monologue competition regional finals in Atlanta—that's the first time they're seeing a True Colors event. So now we can say, 'Hey, remember that monologue you liked? It's actually written by this person and their whole play will now be onstage.'"

Every high school theatre educator invites their students to examine the world in a new way through this ancient art form, in a pursuit that requires self-interrogation, maturity, and courage. The words can come from classic or contemporary text, but the skills required remain the same. Put another way: Late in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Margot rebuffs Anne's offer to join her and Peter for company, saying no for a simple reason. "I have a book," Margot explains.

It is hard not to look back and think about that line, delivered by a kid who struggled to master the task of reading. Sarah, offering that line with delicious irony, didn't throw away an opportunity to pen her own chapter as a teenage thespian. As so many teens have learned firsthand by stepping onto a worn-down high school stage, sometimes just a few words delivered to an audience can change a life in magical ways.

David John Chávez (he/him) is a regular theatre contributor to the San Jose Mercury News*,* San Francisco Chronicle*,* American Theatre *magazine, and KQED (NPR/PBS affiliate), among other publications.*

FEUD *for Thought*

What making a play out of a land dispute in my own hometown taught me about documentary theatre. *By* **KJ SANCHEZ**

Artist Armando Alvarez Compean's 1997 "La Puerta Del Sol," a metal-art sculpture grouping near the settlement of Tomé in New Mexico's Rio Grande River floodplain. (Photo by Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)

In this excerpt from her new book The Radical Act of Listening: Making Documentary and Investigative Theatre *(Routledge, 2024, 272 pp.), Sanchez writes about how her childhood love for a certain television host's fearlessly curious and wide-ranging interviews inspired and informed her first theatre work.*

As a kid, I was obsessed with Dick Cavett—his sly sense of humor and his nerves of steel. He never lost his cool, no matter how cranky his guest, and always found the smoothest way to have the hardest conversation. Cavett was known to say, "It's a rare person who wants to hear what he doesn't want to hear."

What I learned from Dick Cavett is that it's essential to go toward what scares you. One of my first documentary plays sat squarely in the center of some of my biggest fears.

My family, along with nearly everyone in our little town, was involved in a major land feud. Tomé, New Mexico, was settled by the Spanish in the 1630s and was formed as a documented land grant in 1731, when the Spanish government gave this massive tract of land (250,000 acres) to about 30 families. These were my ancestors, who were a combination of Pueblo Indians, Sephardic Jews, and German merchants.

The Tomé Land Grant continued for centuries as a communally owned land grant, from 1731 all the way until the 1970s. If you were born in Tomé and your family was from Tomé, then you inherited a share in this property. Over the centuries and under three different governments—Spain, then Mexico, then the U.S.—the Tomé Land Grant remained intact. The size diminished, as segments of land were lopped off and sold to pay for maintenance or taxes, but for nearly 300 years the people of Tomé shared the land grant.

By the time I was born, the land grant was about 47,000 acres of land, still a rather impressive piece of property, shared by descendants of the founding families. Aside from the fertile Rio Grande River Valley on one end and the mountains on the other, the majority of the property was high desert, very dry, and very sandy. This is the very land that recently served as the backdrop for *Breaking Bad*. Under a huge blue sky surrounded by nothing but desert sage, that great expanse of nothing—that was our Tomé Land Grant. The only way to get much use out of the land was to graze cattle. If you could afford cattle, you could get something out of the land.

Then, from the 1950s to the late 1970s, a feud broke out over the rights to the Tomé Land Grant. Everyone sued everyone; lives were threatened and families torn apart. Sometimes the battle lines cut right through nuclear families: A cousin of mine did not speak to his brother for 13 years, though they lived next door to each other. All told, there were over 100 lawsuits. Ultimately, everyone lost. The suits made their way to the State Supreme Court, where the judge threw out centuries of precedent and decided that the entire land grant was null and void. And just like that, the land was gone. People were left with nothing but their rancor and hatred for each other.

My father was one of the Tomeseños at the center of this war between families. Half of the town thought he was a hero fighting for the poor and the other half thought he was the devil himself, only out for his own personal gain, obsessed with power. Growing up, our house was command central for meetings about the Land Grant, and the stress on my parents—waist-deep in lawsuits and trying to run their own business to provide for their 12 kids—was palpable. That's when I headed out to the llano to pretend that I was Dick Cavett…far, far away from the fighting and worry.

I never expected to be a playwright. That was out of the realm of possibility. Most of us Tomeseños became cowboys or land developers, or worked for the Catholic Church. Somehow, through a series of accidents, I found myself in theatre. I stumbled into it and fell hard and fast and deeply in love with it. I have always loved

KJ Sanchez in "Highway 47" at Yo Solo Festival in Chicago, produced by Teatro Vista and Collaboraction, directed by Lisa Portes. (Photo by Ania Sodziak)

everything about the problem-solving of rehearsal, and I found a particularly deep love for making plays, especially plays about real people and real events.

When I was about 25 and starting my professional theatre career in New York, my father passed away from a stroke after surviving two heart attacks. No doubt the stress of so many years of court battles and personal threats had an impact on his health, as it did on most of the patriarchs of Tomé, many of whom, like my father, died at a relatively young age.

A few years after my dad passed, my mom came to visit me in New York, and one night she said, "Honey, somebody needs to make a book or a movie or something about everything that happened. You should write it all down."

And so I did. I pulled out a tape recorder and started asking her questions. I knew I couldn't do this alone; the subject was far too personal, and I knew I needed collaborators to help me approach the material with expansive listening. So I got a grant and found a theatre company in Albuquerque called Working Classroom, and together we went to Tomé, interviewed Tomeseños who had been involved in the feud, and made a play about it called *Highway 47.*

My first rule of engagement when making a documentary play is, "It ain't about me." I have no interest in putting my own opinion, my own agenda, or my own politics or beliefs onstage. I want to put the opinions, agendas, and politics of the people I interview onstage instead. This ethos probably sounds impossible when working on a story that was so deeply personal, but it was in fact the only way into and through this story.

And, believe it or not, setting my own feelings aside was easier than I thought, because my feelings were rather ambivalent. My mother's family was on one side of this feud, my father's on the other. I was stuck right in the middle. And I needed to stay right there in the middle, the only way to honestly hear both sides of this story.

I worked with Working Classroom's ensemble of actors; I shared with them the interview techniques I was using and we went to Tomé to interview my father's friends and foes alike. For those who were my father's friends, I would introduce myself as Gillie Sanchez's daughter; and for those who were his enemies, I introduced myself as Cipriana's child. My mother was one of the kindest, most generous humans on the planet, and no matter what they thought of my father, they granted me an interview because of their affection for her. When trying to gain access to a closed community like this one, the key for me is this: If you earn just one person's trust, they will then vouch for you and introduce you to others. What can you do to earn that trust? Here are a few suggestions:

Meet that person on their turf. When you set up the interview, ask them where they would prefer to meet, and what is most convenient and comfortable for them. This is incredibly helpful, because the location the person might choose will inform what they tell you. For example, one of my father's enemies chose to meet me at the town cemetery. As we visited graves, he told me stories about each person buried there and we realized that many of his great-great-grandparents were also my great-great-grandparents. This commonality bridged so many gaps for us. On another occasion, a matriarch of the opposition wanted me to go to her home. Tomeseños are very hospitable people, and so she offered me coffee and cookies. We talked about her biscochitos recipe, which was quite like my mother's recipe, and through this talk of cookies, we found common ground.

Be transparent about what you are doing and why you are doing it. With this particular project, I explained that my mission was to capture the whole picture, not just my dad's side of the story, and that I wanted to share the whole story with a larger audience. This play had the potential to be part of the historical narrative of Tomé, so people agreed to be interviewed because they wanted to make sure that their experience and family's role in this feud was properly chronicled.

Be a compassionate, non-judgmental listener. Do your level best to leave your own opinions and judgments at the door. If you share how you feel about something with the interviewee, that will always impact what the interviewee might say. If one of the Tomeseños thought that I was angry at them for their position toward my father, it would color what they shared with me. It was vital that I helped them understand that I wanted to hear it all, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Leave your notebook at home. Keep your list of questions in your back pocket, and just listen. If you are worried you will not remember anything, bring a small, unobtrusive audio recording device with you, turn it on, set it aside, forget about it, and just listen. If you have a notebook out or a list of questions, people might likely feel they are being quizzed and can become self-conscious. I avoid using video cameras because I find some people become self-conscious and can't forget about the camera. We are all familiar with the reality show confession booth, and interviews with video cameras can easily get performative.

Don't go fishing. Let them lead where the interview goes. This requires faith and trust. The best material comes from tangents, from stories that at first might seem like they have nothing to do with the subject. If I went into an interview with what I would consider a fishing question—like, "Tell me how you feel about what my father did"—the answer would likely be short and obvious. So instead, I started with very open-ended questions and then let them lead the way from there. A person can feel when you are really listening without judgment or agenda, and when they feel that, they trust that they can speak candidly and freely and will tell you anything.

In short, you earn someone's trust by putting aside your own needs and agenda and being present and ready to go wherever they lead you. For *Highway 47*, little by little we earned the trust of a handful of Tomeseños, who in turn vouched for us and opened doors we could not have opened otherwise. Little by little, the people I listened to felt they could tell me the story from their personal perspective, even though they knew who my parents were.

I'd like to note here that I offer these strategies as just the beginning of the covenant we create between the people we listen to and the work we make. My plan is not to win their trust just to get the good stuff for my play. My hope is to *earn* their trust. The first step is to listen without judgment, without agenda, and then, of course, I try my best to honor that trust by never intentionally misrepresenting them onstage. I have no interest in twisting what someone has said to prove my point. In fact, we don't need to, because the real is always so much more interesting—to me, at least—than anything I could make up.

KJ Sanchez (she/her) is associate professor in playwriting/directing at the University of Texas at Austin, and the founder and CEO of the theatre company American Records.

INTENSIVE AND IMMERSIVE ACTOR TRAINING AT SAN FRANCISCO'S TONY AWARD-WINNING THEATER

SAN FRANCISCO SEMESTER

FALL 2025:
AUG 25–DEC 16
Apr 4: Early bird deadline
(save $2500 on tuition)
May 16: For most serious consideration
June 20: Financial aid deadline
SPRING 2026: FEB 2–MAY 22

SUMMER TRAINING CONGRESS

SUMMER 2025
JUNE 23–AUG 1
Mar 14: Early bird deadline
(save $1000 on tuition)
Apr 11: Financial aid deadline
May 9: Final deadline

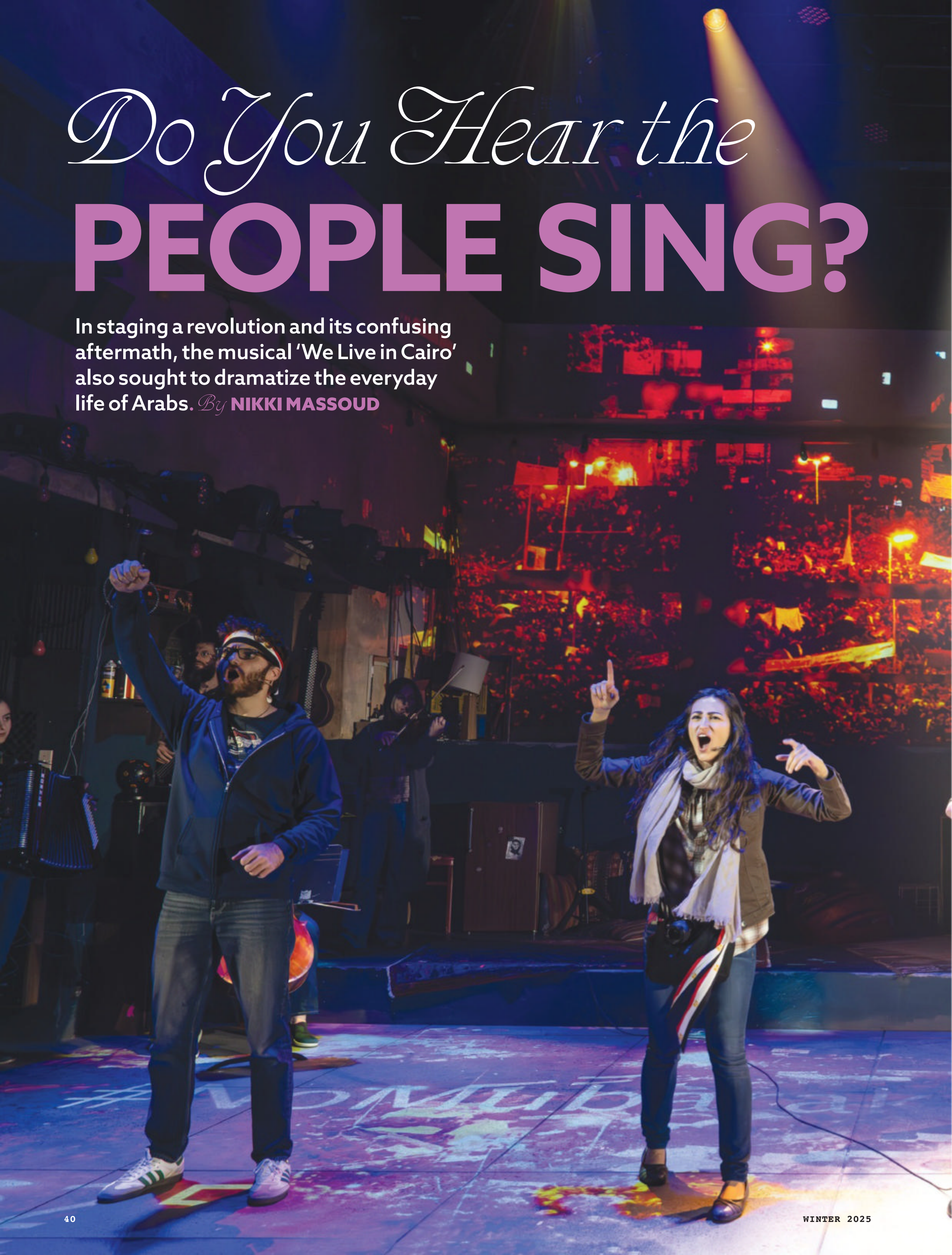
act-sf.org/sfs

A.C.T. AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

act-sf.org/stc

Do You Hear the PEOPLE SING?

In staging a revolution and its confusing aftermath, the musical 'We Live in Cairo' also sought to dramatize the everyday life of Arabs. *By* **NIKKI MASSOUD**



PEOPLE
OF TH

Michael Khalid Karadsheh, Nadina Hassan, Ali Louis Bourzgui, Rotana Tarabzouni, Drew Elhamalawy, and John El-Jor in "We Live in Cairo" at New York Theatre Workshop. (Photo by Joan Marcus)

NEXT
DOOR
@NYTW

Above, clockwise from top left: Director Taibi Magar (left) in rehearsal (photo by Marcus Middleton); Michael Khalid Karadsheh, Drew Elhamalawy, Ali Louis Bourzgui, and Nadina Hassan in tech (photo by Natalie Powers); Drew Elhamalawy, Nadina Hassan, John El-Jor, and Mona Seyed-Bolorforosh in rehearsal (photo by Marcus Middleton); the cast & creative team gathered on the stoop near New York Theatre Workshop (photo by Marcus Middleton). At right: Rotana Tarabzouni & Nadina Hassan (photo by Joan Marcus).

It was a gray New York City afternoon, weeks ahead of the 2024 U.S. election. But on the third floor of New York Theatre Workshop, we were sitting in an arts center in 2011 Cairo in the aftermath of a revolution. The lights were off and the room was lit by a single shaft of sun from a skylight. Red and orange embroidered poufs and woven cushions were scattered over the hard rehearsal floor, along with an oud, a doumbek, hand drums, and a giant papier-mâché caricature head of Hosni Mubarak.

A young, entirely Arab American cast was huddled, along with Egyptian American director Taibi Magar, around a laptop at the center of the room, watching YouTube footage of an Algerian man dancing at the height of the Arab Spring.

"Feedback? What do you see?" Magar asked of the room. She started by giving an answer of her own: "This weird energy is packaged inside something bright, but underneath is this whole other subtext."

"Yeah, why does he sing this bright song in this moment?" actor John El-Jor wondered, now referring not just to the Algerian man on the video but to his character, Karim, the charming, witty, and wounded queer scion of a wealthy family, who leads the number the cast are about to rehearse, "(The Benevolent Regime of) King Farouk II." The song begins as a playful political satire of Western puppet dictators but eventually veers into frustration, longing, and grief to match the simmering tension among the characters in the room.

El-Jor sang the number a few times—running, jumping, climbing on a table—as he, Magar, and the cast kept trying to pinpoint the moment when Karim's song transitions from a joyful, clever distraction to an expression of rage. And then love.

This was one of the persistent dilemmas at the heart of creating *We Live in Cairo*, a new musical centered around six young student activists during the Egyptian revolution of early 2011: How do you fit the triumphs, losses, and complex emotions of a real historical event inside the traditionally very neat and shiny package of the American musical?

It's a paradox that animates many of the most iconic American musicals, including *Cabaret*, *Hamilton*, and, possibly *We Live in Cairo*'s most direct musical theatre ancestor, Jonathan Larson's *Rent*, also famously developed and produced at New York Theatre Workshop. Even NYTW's location in the East Village evokes a history of protest and counterculture, as well as recent Palestinian solidarity encampments and pro-Palestine and pro-Israel student demonstrations at NYU's campus right down the street.

"I feel like it's in the DNA of the area, and it's in the DNA of the workshop," artistic director Patricia McGregor told me. "This felt like a continuation of that examination of, how do young artists use their voice to activate the world? What are the pitfalls? What are the points of hope? And how do we keep going?"

Events
Tahrir Square
ميدان التحرير
JAN 25

NYTW produced *We Live in Cairo* Oct. 9-Nov. 24, 2024, as part of a season that includes Palestinian writer/performer Khawla Ibraheem's *A Knock on the Roof*, a gripping one-woman play about a mother's fight to survive in Gaza, as well as *Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole*, a show from McGregor and Colman Domingo about the singer's mid-century struggles with NBC to save his groundbreaking variety show. Though NYTW came under fire last year for not releasing a letter demanding a ceasefire in Gaza (inspiring former resident playwright Victor Cazares to go on an HIV meds strike in protest), the theatre's programming is amplifying the voices of Arab artists in two major new works, giving both Ibraheem and the Lazour brothers, the creators of *Cairo*, their first New York productions.

> **"Being Egyptian, I felt like the show was calling me in so many ways."**

It is a significant choice. While last fall La MaMa produced a 10-day run of *The Mulberry Tree*, Hanna Eady and Edward Mast's play set in historic Palestine, and Noor Theatre continually develops and supports the work of Arab artists from all over the world, NYTW is the only New York theatre—perhaps the only American theatre—of comparable size, resources, and influence to include not one but two shows centering sympathetic Arab characters in its 2024-25 season.

Inspired by real Egyptian student activists, *We Live in Cairo* follows six friends who bring all their skills and gifts to the struggle to overthrow Hosni Mubarak's crushing 30-year regime. They take photographs, paint murals, compose songs, and disseminate revolutionary messages and art through the internet. The set, designed by Tilly Grimes, featured canvases evoking the tents of protesters in Tahrir Square, and showcased an ensemble of onstage musicians who sometimes joined the action onstage. David Bengali designed quick, thrilling projections of the tweets, posts, and televised addresses that eventually inspired over a million protesters to join the struggle. Magar skillfully layered onstage action with the singing and chants of performers, the footage of the crowds in Tahrir Square, the unfurling of canvases, and the sounds of explosions and tear gas—all creating the sensation of standing in a square packed with people, feeling the ebbs and flows of a massive historic event.

The musical chronicles the success of the revolution and the celebrations of Mubarak's downfall. In the confusion that followed, the democratically elected but regressive Muslim Brother-

Drew Elhamalawy, John El-Jor, Ali Louis Bourzgui, Nadina Hassan, Rotana Tarabzouni, and Michael Khalid Karadsheh in "We Live in Cairo" at New York Theatre Workshop. (Photo by Joan Marcus)

hood member Mohamed Morsi was himself overthrown by yet another military dictator, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who is still Egypt's president. Throughout the turmoil, we watch these hopeful young revolutionaries struggle to hang onto their hopes, their ideals, and their connections with each other.

Like the 2011 revolution itself, *We Live in Cairo* was many years in the making. Its creators, Lebanese American writer/composers Daniel and Patrick Lazour, who are brothers, began work on the show in 2013. One of their first challenges was to find a signature sound for the piece: something unmistakably theatrical, while clearly influenced by Middle Eastern music. The brothers were especially inspired by protest music from around the world, including the songs of Egyptian singer/songwriter Sheikh Imam, banned from Egyptian radio but still popular throughout the Arab world; Silvio Rodriguez, the Cuban folk singer and leader of the Nueva Trova movement; and, of course, Oum Kalthoum, the iconic Egyptian singer, once also banned from Egyptian airwaves after a regime change, whose patriotic songs have made her a legend.

We Live in Cairo's structure evokes many familiar Western musicals: The songs advance the action and/or deepen character (Sondheim), the story centers two pairs of star-crossed lovers (multiple Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals), the first act ends with the ensemble facing the audience in a line at a revolution (*Les Misérables*), and the second act begins with a highly emotional group a cappella performance (*Rent*).

But the Middle Eastern influence on the score also manifests throughout: in the fluid onstage presence of the musicians, in oud and doumbek instrumentation, in vocal runs, trills, riffs, quarter tones, and what the Lazours call "killer, danceable rhythms." Middle Eastern vocal ornamentation is used effectively throughout the show to convey heightened emotions, but most unforgettably in Palestinian actress Rotana Tarabzouni's spectacular, shattering performance of the song "Each and Every Name," which is both a mourning song and a call to action.

"I felt a real barrier to [the audience] making a connection to Arab characters."

Over the last 12 years, W*e Live in Cairo* has been developed and performed everywhere from the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) Festival, to the O'Neill Conference, from SPACE at Ryder Farm to American Repertory Theater (ART), where it had its first full production in 2019. Magar and the Lazours also traveled to Egypt for research and spoke with artists, professors, and students at the American University in Cairo.

Once the show finally got in front of audiences at ART, Magar and the Lazours identified a new challenge: Even within the familiar framework of musical theatre, would American audiences connect with a group of Egyptian student activists?

"I think it's very interesting subject matter, and people really do love it and really appreciate it," reflected lyricist and book writer Patrick Lazour. "But finding a large audience for this show is something we're still trying to figure out." Added composer Daniel Lazour, "The mission of the show was so that a Western audience could see themselves in these young Egyptians, you know? So the challenge is the point, also."

Magar offered a more intimate perspective on the experience. "I remember watching the show at ART," she said during a break from rehearsal. "I know that audience well, have directed there many times. I love that audience, they're really smart. And then I sort of watched that audience go…" Magar tilted her head to one side, imitating a look of detached puzzlement. "I felt a real barrier to making a connection to Arab characters. It felt like they were struggling with that connection."

Magar wondered if those 2019 audiences were unable to relate to the young students in *We Live in Cairo* because Americans often only hear about Arabs in the context of wars, national security, and villainous characters on long-running shows like *Homeland*. Perhaps audiences were not used to imagining ordinary Arab students with families and friends and simple, relatable aspirations.

"I mean, it was extraordinary that ART even programmed us—it's not been an easy road for Arab and Arab American stories," said Magar. The American theatre has "started to open up past white-centered narratives, but I think Arab stories got left behind. So I think that's part of the growth—that's part of why it took 10 years."

The world has shifted since 2019 in ways that undoubtedly change the way *We Live in Cairo* has been received—for better and possibly worse. For one, pandemic-induced theatre closings slowed the progress of new musicals in development. On the domestic front, Americans now share the experience of having a democratically elected leader who, like Mohamed Morsi, masquerades as a populist but constitutes a serious threat to the rights of women and minorities. On an international front, the Israel-Palestine war that has raged since Hamas attacked Israel in October 2023, and Israel counter-attacked Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, leading to tens of thousands of civilian deaths, has altered the power dynamics of the Middle East. So has the more recent toppling of Syria's Assad regime by rebels, currently supported by Turkish, American, and Israeli forces. The region's future has seldom seemed more uncertain.

And Arab identity and humanity are, again, a subject of intense public debate and protest, in America and all over the world. And given the George Floyd protests of 2020, millions of Americans now share the lived experience of taking to the streets in protest, like the young students in *We Live in Cairo*.

"There are many reasons why the George Floyd protests and the Egyptian uprising are very different," Magar noted. "But they both started with police brutality." Indeed, a gruesome photo of Khaled Said, a 28-year-old Egyptian man beaten to death by Egyptian police officers in 2010, belied the government's false account of his death, triggering online horror and outrage and inspiring thousands to join the protest movement. "I think there's now a real shared understanding," said Magar. "I think we understand, or are struggling and trying to understand, how to liberate each other and ourselves from systems of oppression."

The first act of *We Live in Cairo* seems to suggest that we can do just that: The students organize and create art, their work and their movement goes viral, a million people take to the streets, and they overthrow a seemingly immovable dictatorship. Impossible love stories seem possible—including a burgeoning queer romance, a rarity in Western popular media set in the Middle East. Liberation is seemingly within reach. The students drink, kiss, dance, dream, gossip, and (of course) sing together.

For the creative team of *We Live in Cairo*, showcasing Arab humor, warmth, joy, and individuality on an American stage feels as radical as any of the story's political discourse. "The Arab culture is one of hospitality and of love," said Daniel Lazour. "That is often kind of hushed or buried in the narrative." In the second act, of course, joy and optimism yield to more complicated emotions for these young activists.

Gathered for a group interview, almost all of the show's per-

UNDERGRADUATE
STUDY AWAY SEMESTER IN
NEW YORK CITY
- FULL COLLEGE CREDIT

TRINITY LA MAMA
PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAM

Based at the
Tony Award-Winning
LA MAMA
EXPERIMENTAL
THEATRE CLUB

TAKE CLASSES
IN MOVEMENT, VOICE
AND ACTING OR DANCE

PARTICIPATE IN
WORKSHOPS
WITH NYC BASED ARTISTS

ATTEND AROUND
50 SHOWS
IN A WIDE VARIETY
OF GENRES

CREATE
AND PERFORM
ORIGINAL WORK

INTERN
AT AN ARTS
ORGANIZATION

Applications for FALL 2025
now open until
MARCH 1ST

Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

@trinitylamama
trinitylamama.org

Nadina Hassan, Michael Khalid Karadsheh, John El-Jor, Ali Louis Bourzgui, and Rotana Tarabzouni in "We Live in Cairo" at New York Theatre Workshop. (Photo by Joan Marcus) formers describe the experience of encountering the show for the first time as surprising, surreal, emotional, even mystical—because they had never gotten the opportunity to play contemporary, multidimensional, empathetic Arab or Egyptian characters in a musical. “I think the story they’re telling is one that hasn’t been heard before,” said actor Drew Elhamalawy, who plays Hassan, an idealistic working-class street artist caught between his family’s expectations and his romantic connection with Karim. “Being Egyptian, and my dad being from Cairo, I felt like the show was calling me in so many ways. Also, being gay and getting to a play a gay Egyptian onstage—I don’t think it’s ever been done on a New York stage.”

I saw the show with a full house a few weeks before Election Day and observed a lot of crying.

This humanization might have helped American audiences form an emotional connection to these young Egyptian characters. A little musical theatre star power may not have hurt either.

“It feels like a bridge that audiences are able to look and say, ‘Oh my God, I loved that dude in The Who’s *Tommy*,’ ” said John El-Jor, referring to his castmate Ali Louis Bourzgui, who played that title role on Broadway last spring and in *Cairo* played Amir, a Coptic Christian musician who becomes YouTube-famous for his performance in Tahrir Square. “Or, like, ‘Oh my God, that’s Regina George!’” El-Jor added, gesturing to castmate Nadina Hassan, who played Layla, a young Muslim photographer, and who led the national *Mean Girls* tour. That kind of familiarity, he imagined, might help an audience think, “Oh, that’s my friend who I’ve gotten drunk with and who I’ve cried with and who does crazy things, and, like—oh God, they should not have kissed that boy!”

Bourzgui and Hassan, whose characters fall in love, both acknowledged the emotional challenges and costs of embodying these roles during a moment of profound grief for many Arabs and Arab Americans.

“It feels unlike any other job I’ve ever experienced,” Hassan said. She described feeling a “civic duty” to do right by her character, a sense of both honor and obligation—and inescapable sadness. “Just coming in and doing a show about this, where there’s not really a happy resolution, after reading the news, it’s just…really, really challenging every day.”

Added Bourzgui, “There’s such a danger in the fact that almost everyone in America only sees numbers always, or just one generalized, blanketed idea of one population.” He hoped that, by focusing on six distinct characters, *We Live in Cairo* would show audiences “these are the people we are talking about, and these are also the people that are dying currently. It’s not just numbers. Remember that these people are

GULFSHORE PLAYHOUSE

Welcome to your *new* home for professional theatre.

The Baker Theatre and Education Center

Scan here to see our season lineup

100 GOODLETTE-FRANK ROAD S., NAPLES, FL 34102 | GULFSHOREPLAYHOUSE.ORG

humans with entire lives and entire love stories."

Michael Khalid Karadsheh, who played Amir's pragmatic, perceptive brother and songwriting partner, said the cast had been watching *The Square*, an Emmy-winning documentary from 2013 about the Egyptian revolution and the subsequent crisis. "Every time I revisit it, I'm hit with an extreme weight of the responsibility we all bear to tell the story, and to tell it in a way with nuance," Karadsheh said. "But also, we are working within a container of, you know, musical theatre. It's a beautiful, beautiful challenge."

The classic American musical usually offers a palatable balance of humor and darkness. But *We Live in Cairo* recounts real events—often tragic and dangerous—which are often difficult to leaven with glamor or jokes. Most American musicals also chart a journey with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and people often leave with a message. *We Live in Cairo* instead ends in uncertainty. After all, how can we be certain of the outcome of a recent historical event with ongoing consequences?

Of course, *We Live in Cairo* does not purport to be the definitive story of the Egyptian revolution. As is true for the representation of many marginalized groups, if Arab and Egyptian stories were more common in the American theatre, it's unlikely that audiences would expect any one story to represent every Arab or Egyptian experience. Even so, *We Live in Cairo* does set out to offer a message: a perspective on activism that audiences may recognize from experience. The story of these six young friends suggests, poignantly, that building something new and better is often a much longer and harder process than tearing something down, and that even one person's smallest act of bravery—sharing an idea, saying a prayer, holding up a photograph, bringing food to a friend—can be revolutionary.

I saw *We Live In Cairo* with a full house during early previews a few weeks before Election Day and observed a lot of crying in the audience during the second act. After the show, someone in the lobby joked that the show could sell signature souvenir boxes of tissues, like the recent Broadway production of *The Notebook*. But are tears, an innovative score, a familiar structure, and the common experience of living under misogynistic, xenophobic, regressive leadership enough to make audiences relate to the struggles of student activists from 13 years ago and 5,600 miles away?

For Karadsheh, building audience identification with the characters remains the most difficult challenge of working on *We Live in Cairo*—and the most important metric of the show's success.

"The urgency with which I feel the story is that I want to shake the audience and say, *This is about you*," he said. "We're doing it through a musical theatre lens, but in my heart, what I want to say is, Look at me. *This is about you*."

Nikki Massoud is an Iranian Canadian American writer, performer, and audiobook narrator based in Brooklyn. She currently holds play commissions with Atlantic Theater Company, The Acting Company, and Noor Theatre, and is a 2050 Fellow at New York Theatre Workshop.

MFA

ACTING
COSTUME PRODUCTION
TECHNICAL PRODUCTION

THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL

PLAYMAKERS REPERTORY COMPANY

playmakersrep.org
drama.unc.edu

SETC SOUTHEASTERN THEATRE CONFERENCE

URTA

THEATER THAT *MOVES*

Jamar Jones '24 - *Fat Ham*
Saleemah Sharpe '24 - *Clyde's*
Jeffrey Cornell - *Murder on the Orient Express*
Credit Huth Photo

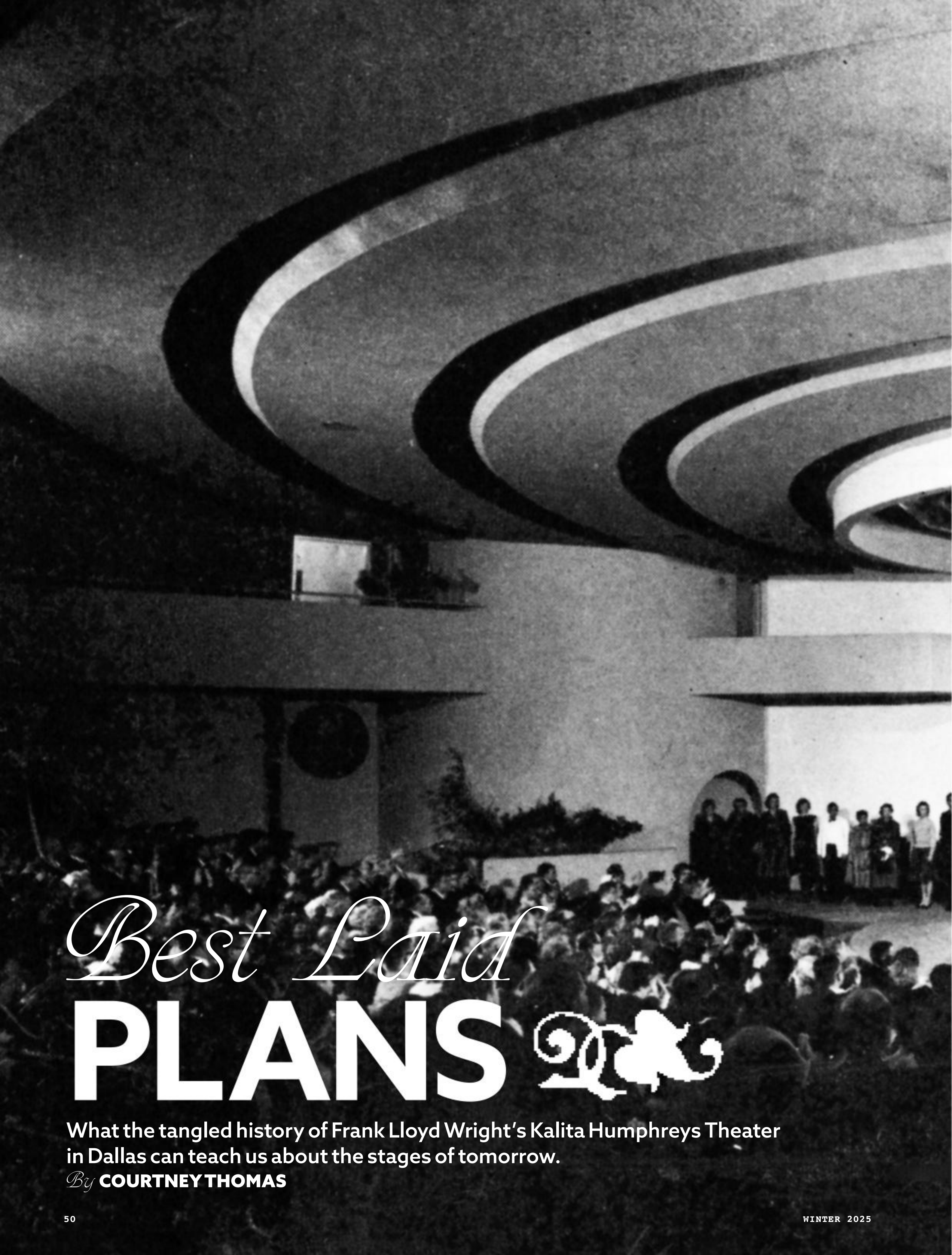
THE AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF DRAMATIC ARTS
NEW YORK CITY

STAGE | SCREEN | MUSICAL THEATRE

Our alumni have been nominated for an unprecedented

112 OSCARS® 359 EMMYS® 102 TONYS®

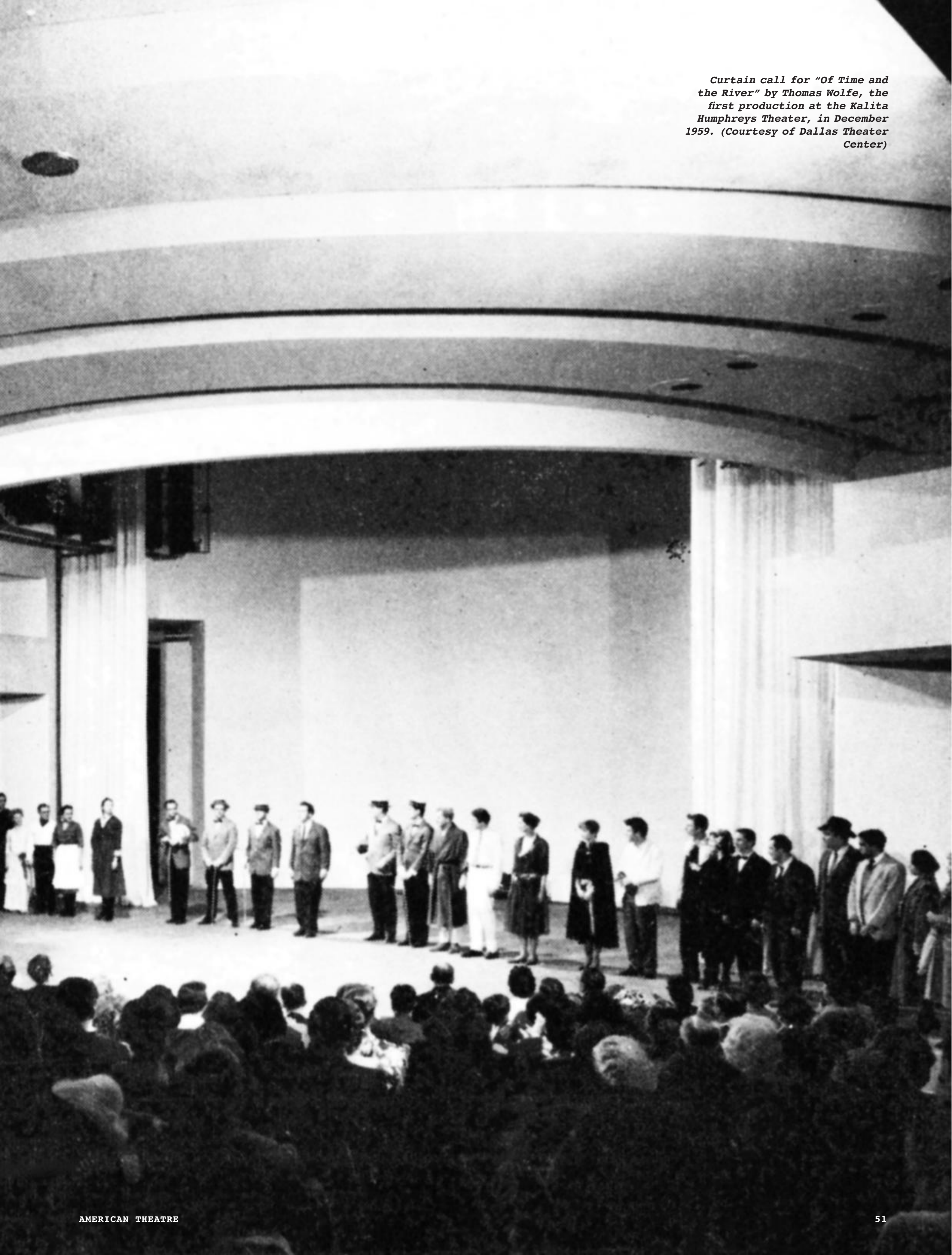
LEARN MORE AT AADA.EDU/AT2025



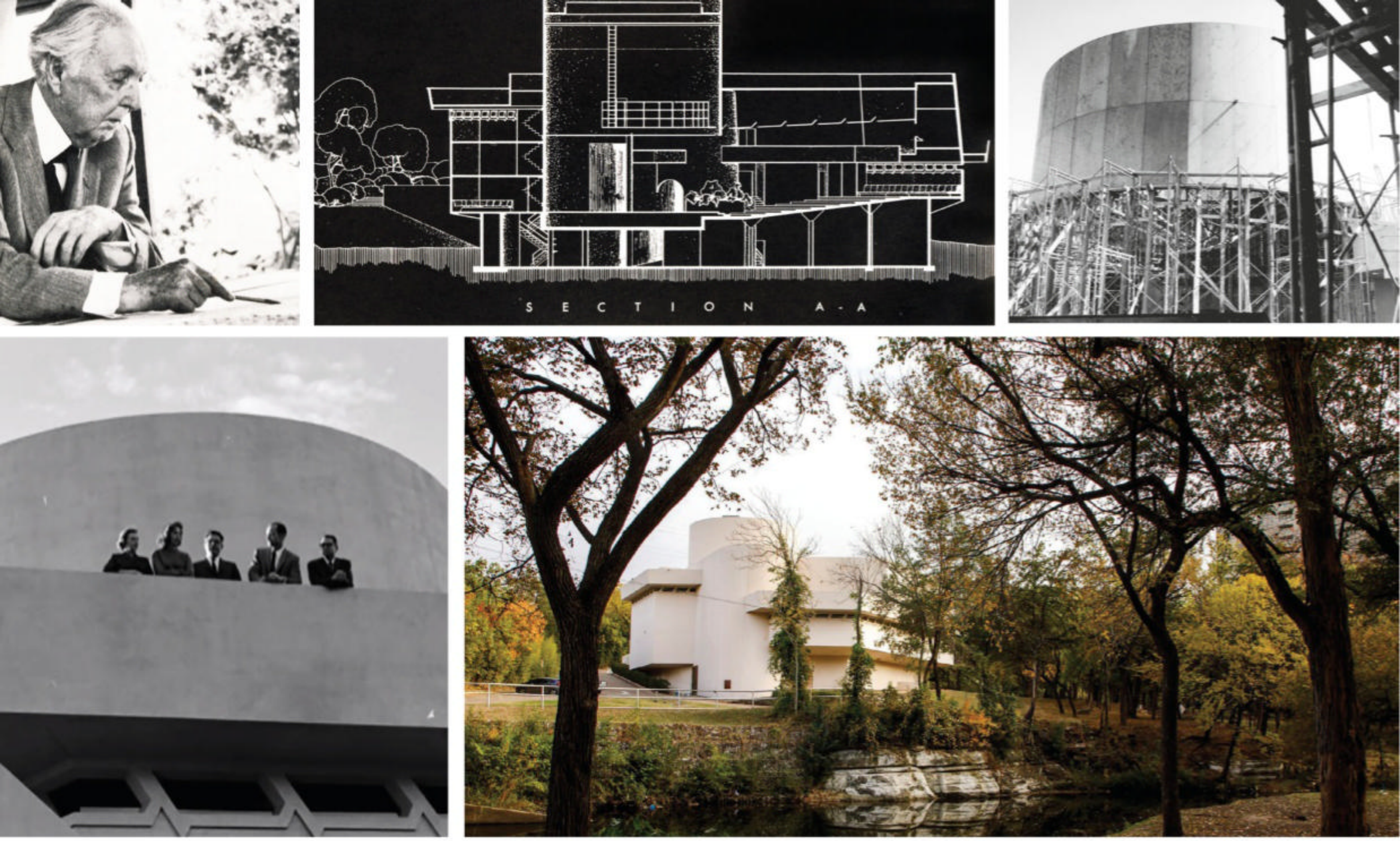
Best Laid PLANS

What the tangled history of Frank Lloyd Wright's Kalita Humphreys Theater in Dallas can teach us about the stages of tomorrow.

By **COURTNEY THOMAS**



Curtain call for "Of Time and the River" by Thomas Wolfe, the first production at the Kalita Humphreys Theater, in December 1959. (Courtesy of Dallas Theater Center)



Top: Frank Lloyd Wright; a cross section of the Kalita Humphreys Theater, and early progress on constructing the theatre's drum. Bottom: A group gathers on the roof of the Kalita Humphreys Theater. The Kalita Humphreys Theater in more recent years, "a cement bunker surrounded by trees." (All photos courtesy of Dallas Theater Center; color photo by Imani Thomas)

In December 1959, the Kalita Humphreys Theater, the striking concrete home of Dallas Theater Center (DTC), welcomed its first audience. But its architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, never saw a performance there. America's most famous modern architect died just eight months before the opening of the theatre he called "one of the things I simply have to do before they put me in a box." Still, the theatre's curving walls, cantilevered levels, and distinctive stage unmistakably bore his mark.

It was not Wright's work alone. The Kalita was also shaped by the collaborative input of a forward-thinking director named Paul Baker. Baker grew up in Waxahachie, Texas, earned a master's degree in drama at Yale, and served as a theatrical specialist during WWII, organizing the entertainment branch of the European theatre of operation. Brought on as DTC's founding artistic director, Baker, then chair of the Baylor University drama department, was among the first to suggest Wright as architect.

But as the two fought over expanding backstage space and adding a freight elevator, Baker learned the hard way that "the real Frank Lloyd Wright was a little different than the Frank Lloyd Wright in his books and his writings," as Baker's daughter, Robyn Flatt, a DTC company member for more than two decades, recalled in an interview.

In fact, the Kalita was the byproduct of a troubled partnership between this Texan director, influenced by the wide open spaces of his youth, and Frank Lloyd Wright, the pioneering designer behind organic architecture. In the years since its construction, the building's legacy has been hotly contested: Dallas Theater Center's own promotional publications have called it both "a great work of art" and a "cement bunker surrounded by trees," both a "success as a practical, functioning place for theatre work" and "the worst theatre ever built."

At the heart of these radically different descriptions is a building that has struggled since it was built to "be all things to all people," as Ann Abernathy, architect and author of the theatre's designation report, put it. It housed the Dallas Theater Center's mainstage season for 50 years, functioned as a graduate theatre school for 33 years, and continues to host community events and theatrical productions by DTC and other companies.

The theatre—owned since 1973 by the city of Dallas, and leased back to DTC for $1 a year—is currently in sorry shape. Thanks to deferred maintenance, the white exterior is streaked with black dirt and the Wright-designed fountains out front are covered in rust. In fall 2023, *Texas Monthly* reported that the lobby bar is missing chunks, the primary bathrooms haven't been updated since the '80s, stage equipment is outdated, the rehearsal room floor is "worn with deep gouges, and several air vents have dark splotches that look like mold."

In May 2024, a bond designated $8.9 million for repairs to the Kalita Humphreys Theater, but it will cover only the bare minimum to keep the space functional—i.e., repairing or replacing the HVAC system, replacing fire alarms, public safety and security upgrades, ADA accessibility, and backstage enhancements. Since efforts to coalesce around a master plan for the site foundered for the second time in 15 years last spring, the time is ripe for a conversation about what this theatre was designed to do—and what its successes and failures can tell us about the future of performance space design.

The Wright Way

When Wright agreed to design the Kalita, it was on the condition that he would use an update of the New Theater plans he'd first created in 1931 and adapted over the years for yet-unrealized projects in the Northeast. Wright had been at work on his New Theater concept since 1915, a culmination of ideas he felt would redeem "the rubbish heap that is the ordinary theatre" by constructing an intimate relationship between the audience and performers, prioritizing acoustics, and introducing innovations to unify the various spaces within the theatre building. His plans would also improve audience seating and make plays cheaper to produce in the bargain.

Wright's New Theater concept, explained Joseph Siry, PhD, a professor of modern architectural history, was conceived to serve "theatrical management content with far more modest profits, producing year-round with a resident company of actors, and aiming to please a permanent local audience with a high standard in their material and production." Fortunately, Baker's original vision for the DTC fit this model.

What both Baker and Wright wanted above all was "an experimental avant-garde theatre," said Abernathy. In particular, the two men connected around a desire to "break the box," as Wright put it, and design a theatre without a proscenium. Wright railed against the "present peep-show character" of "the so-called legitimate stage." He felt that proscenium theatres made shows "more like a painting…audience in one room, performers in another." In his vision for the New Theater, audience and performers would be "under one ceiling—almost in one room—more like sculpture."

At Baylor, Baker had already "broken the box" his way. He designed Studio One in a converted warehouse with two side stages and a larger central stage. Audiences in swivel chairs turned seats to face the action. In Baker's words, it was "probably one of the best theatre spaces in America, or in the world, for experimental theatre." The works he produced in Studio One included an *Othello* inspired by Cubist art he'd seen on a trip to Paris; three actors played each part, representing a different part of their character's psyche.

While Baker's experiments were inspired by modern painting, Wright saw the contemporary stage as under threat of being "done to death by the movies and television," and in need of saving. His revolving turntable would allow for quick scene changes, as fast as film's jump cuts. This turntable, and the music balconies Wright included in the design, also reflected the influence of Japanese architecture and Kabuki theatre.

Wright's buildings, innovative in both design and form, were also a medium through which he tried to teach people how to live. Many of the homes he designed feature galley kitchens and cramped bedrooms off narrow, low-ceilinged halls, pushing inhabitants to spend their time connecting in light-filled living rooms. Indeed, in 1950, when he built a spiral-shaped home for his son David, Wright was so straightforward about the didactic nature of his designs, he even titled the plans "How to Live in the Southwest."

When Wright set out to design the Kalita, another spiral-shaped building, he also brought ideas about how a theatre should be used to the project. This somewhat inflexible attitude meant, though, that integrating changes was a challenge. "You don't work with Frank Lloyd Wright," Baker said in an oral history now housed at Baylor University. "He tells you what you are going to get."

Wright's stylized windows on the back wall of the house, for instance, had to be covered with plywood to control the interior lighting during a show, and the hidden alcoves for lighting instruments he designed for the ceiling ultimately proved ill-adapted to lighting a show in more than one way.

For his part, Wright saw these difficulties as features rather than bugs. "The simpler the stage is kept," Wright is reported to have said, "the greater will be the things done upon it. The classic Greek stages were without equipment for lighting and scenery." To Wright, a theatre was a "temple," with a focus on dramatic action, not commercial spectacle. Accordingly, he minimized the backstage space and put the scene shop in the basement. He designed ramps that led from the scene shop to the stage, which he felt served the dual purposes of restricting scenery and unifying form and function in the building.

In a 2014 journal article penned by Siry, Baker recalled Wright saying that he didn't want his "temple filled up with old dirty scenery stage left and right. He felt that if we had ramps going down and very little offstage area that we would keep the temple clean and beautiful and there would be no place to put scenery and junk of that kind." But Baker wasn't on board with this part of Wright's vision. As Flatt told me:

> You couldn't get a platform over a certain size to make the curve, so Dad told [Wright], "Look, we have to have a better way to get scenery up to the stage," and Frank Lloyd Wright didn't want to hear about that…He said, "Nobody has ever told me one of my buildings wouldn't work." And so that created a huge division…My dad had gone out to Taliesin [West] to meet with him, to go over the plans and say, "Here, we need this and that, we need this change here, this change, this change, and this change." Frank Lloyd Wright was furious and said, "You have to leave right now."… And they thought, "The whole deal's gonna fall apart."

Fortunately, Kelly Oliver, an architect on Wright's team, was able to quietly introduce some compromises. The Kalita was built with one elevator and one ramp—and Wright never learned of these changes.

Thrown for a Curve

When the Kalita opened, the effects of these design choices became more apparent, both for good and ill. In some ways, Wright's genius made the space a uniquely functional gem. Baker noted, "The furthest seat was only 55 feet from the stage. It's very intimate, wonderful—the acoustics are excellent."

Still, Flatt said that Wright's design "was in a way very limiting…He already gave the shape, and if you could work within that, the production would be magical, and look and be wonderful. If you happened to try something else, you had a lot of barriers, and you were fighting the space…We created a lot of incredible productions there, but it was work."

Baker and the DTC performers also found a workaround for the space's limitations, carving an ad-hoc performance space out of the basement, with a somewhat triangular proscenium stage squeezed between two columns. Known as the Down Center Stage, it "had an oddball shape, as it went back following the lines of the building, because we were up against the back wall," said Flatt. "It was a small space, but it was intimate and it was fun. We did some very experimental stuff…That's where Preston Jones's *Texas Trilogy* was born." The experimentation paid off: Jones's *Trilogy* went to Broadway, and he was featured on the cover of the October 1976 issue of *Smithsonian* magazine.

That the Kalita's basement could spare space for the Down Center Stage was a matter of pure luck. As Abernathy put it, DTC "ran out of space the day they moved in." Added Flatt, "The graduate school at one point had 80 students in it. We used every inch of that building. The little library on the side of the auditorium had to become a classroom and a rehearsal space; we rehearsed in the lobby; we rehearsed down in the scene shop, in the restroom lobby."

As full as it was, the building provided a unique and memorable home for theatre students.

"I can remember being in those curved hallways running scenes with classmates," said Jeff Storer, a 1982 graduate of the Trinity University Dallas Theater Center MFA program. The image he recalls, he said, is of "a beehive, in the way that you feel that sort of buzz of a colony of bees working together in the same structure—and even the shape of the beehive. No matter what floor you were on, you were in curved hallways. The stage was echoing that round sense of the building as well."

"You feel that buzz of a colony of bees working together in the same structure—and even the shape of the beehive."

Several small additions were made between 1965 and 1968 to add workspace, and the terrace Wright had designed for guests to enjoy during intermission was enclosed to create more rehearsal space. Between 1983 and 1989, after Baker left and during Adrian Hall's term as artistic director, several more changes came: The rake of the audience seating was changed, altering the acoustics, and the seats Wright had designed to make it easier for audience members to walk past each other were replaced. The taupe interior was repainted dark green, and new stage lights were hung on pipes suspended from Wright's ceiling coves. Wright's stairs were adjusted to have wider treads and standard perpendicular angles. A parking lot was added, leveling areas of sloped terrain. To further address the problem of limited space, some rooms were partitioned, others expanded, and a two-story rectangular "auxiliary building," called the Heldt Administration Building, was added to the Kalita's grounds.

Former theatre critic Jeremy Gerard accompanied Hall on his first tour of the space. "Adrian is realizing for the first time that this may be the worst theatre ever built," Gerard recalled for a 50th anniversary retrospective published by DTC in 2018. "There's no fly space, no trap space. He is looking around, saying, 'But where will my angels come from? Where will my devils come from?'" The theatre's limitations seemed to be working just as the spectacle-adverse Wright had intended. As Hall himself reflected, "It was not a practical space. Frank Lloyd Wright had the very imaginative idea of bringing in the scenery through a tunnel that wound up into this round theatre. It seemed like a good idea, but it really wasn't."

In addition to making adjustments to the Kalita, Hall responded to the space's challenges by building a provisional offsite venue for the company. Called the Arts District Theater, this was a metal warehouse located where the Winspear Opera House now stands. Remembered as "the most flexible theatre in America," it freed DTC from "the need to avoid harming expensive interior finishes," but ultimately proved a temporary structure.

Second Thoughts

The late '90s and early 2000s saw some restoration efforts at the Kalita, but in 2009, DTC unveiled a new permanent home for their mainstage season, the Dee and Charles Wyly Theatre at the AT&T Performing Arts Center, a flexible modern space in the arts district. While this new home meant that DTC would no longer operate solely out of the Kalita on a permanent basis, the company didn't abandon the building altogether. The company continues to lease it from the city for $1 per year, under an agreement active until June 2025, and the Kalita still hosts part of the DTC season (most recently, *Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors*, next *Shane*).

Other groups in need of an auditorium have rented the space from DTC since the company began working primarily out of the Wyly, including LGBTQ-focused theatre company Uptown Players, an anchor tenant of the Kalita since 2010. After performing in a small 120-seat space for their first eight seasons, moving to the Kalita allowed Uptown Players to welcome larger audiences. The company has since adapted to the space. "We have learned how to take advantage of the intimacy of the venue," said Jeff Rane, the company's executive producer. "Our sets and our staging take advantage of the height and the openness of the performance space."

Another anchor tenant, experimental theatre company Second Thought Theatre, rents the Heldt Annex Building on the Kalita's grounds, but not for the offices it originally housed. The founders of Second Thought have converted the empty building into a black box called Bryant Hall, just as during Baker's tenure the Down Center Stage was created to host experimental drama that the Kalita's unique design couldn't accommodate. Somewhat ironically, though the Kalita was intended to be a home for avant-garde performance, and its mainstage is still an active venue, the place to find avant-garde offerings on the Kalita's grounds is in a converted space far simpler than those either Baker or Wright envisioned for the purpose.

Indeed, though Frank Lloyd Wright's theatre was designed to prioritize intimacy and affordability, the Bryant Hall black box is proof that actors don't need a space as designed as Wright's to have an affordable, intimate place to perform. The simplicity of the black box achieves one of Wright's main goals: to get rid of the proscenium and put actors and audiences in the same room.

Attention Must Be Paid

Still, the Kalita is something a converted office can never be: a landmark performance venue designed to impart a vision of what theatre can and should be. What will the Kalita be after another 65 years have passed? Is it destined to be an orphan, stranded between the visionary plans of its designer and the needs of theatremakers? Will it outlast the city of Dallas itself, as Wright predicted, or be destroyed by neglect?

The Kalita's decline has been exacerbated by 15 years of inaction. In 2010, a city-commissioned plan to restore the building was never formally adopted amid the economic pressures of the recession. In 2019, the city asked DTC for a new master plan—then balked at the price tag of the 2022 proposal, created by celebrated architecture firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro, which would open the site to the adjacent Katy Trail (a running and cycling path through Dallas), restore many 1959 architectural details, provide new rehearsal and performance spaces to replace the additions to the Kalita over the decades, and address accessibility and parking concerns.

Though progress appears to have stalled again, DTC executive director and CEO Kevin Moriarty sounded bullish on future prospects, saying that the company is "partnering with the City of Dallas Office of Arts and Culture to bring together a wide variety of community stakeholders and international experts to envision a restoration of the building." He predicted that the city would likely take a few years to adopt a plan; in the meantime, fundraising from public and private sources will continue, with "likely 80 percent or more of the funding" coming from donors.

If the Kalita's potential currently remains hidden behind its dilapidated present state, to those who remember, its value is worth fighting for. "It's my favorite theatre in the world," said Trey Birkhead, who grew up watching his aunt, Mary Sue Jones, perform and direct at the Kalita, and participated in DTC's children and teen's program himself.

While there are no easy answers to the question of the building's future, performance spaces yet to be designed can still learn from the space and its history. One lesson: Beauty fades if a space isn't continually invested in. Dedication to specific elements—whether negotiable, like scenery ramps, or essential, like quality acoustics—doesn't guarantee that a space will be workable. Design and flexibility are a balance, and as theatre architecture moves forward, climate-friendly design will be part of the equation too.

Collaboration between architects and theatremakers needs to be a two-way street. The Kalita is a difficult space because of the extent to which Wright ignored Baker's requests for changes. But it's also a space that, for those willing to work with it, elevates a particular production approach. Listening to theatremakers about their immediate needs can make for functional spaces. For all its quirks, the Kalita also shows that attention to architectural detail can turn a building into a home for great theatre.

It may have more to teach us about adaptation. As Kevin Moriarty put it, "In the mid-1950s, when Dallas Theater Center was formed and Frank Lloyd Wright was hired, few could imagine the creative richness of the American regional theatre movement that would take root and flourish in the coming decades." Today, he added, the American theatre is "at the edge of a similar moment of opportunity and transformation nationwide, as we seek to serve our communities in new ways that are responsive to the nation's current needs, hopes, and aspirations." Viewing the theatre's history of trial and error as an inspiration rather than a liability, he concluded, "The Kalita serves as an embodiment of our artistic legacy and a call to boldly innovate."

Courtney Thomas is a writer and curator whose work appears in Texas Monthly, *Slate,* Sightlines, *Glasstire,* Texas Highways, *and other publications. She holds BAs in Theatre and in Humanities from the University of Texas at Austin.*

Writer. Director. Actor. Content Creator.

And so much more!

The interdisciplinary curriculum at Northeastern's Department of Theatre allows you to explore a variety of creative pursuits, from theatrical design to acting, to our new degree in Performance and XR, all while gaining experience in professional theatres across the country.

Learn more about the department and all the possibilities at camd.northeastern.edu/theatre/

CAMD
Northeastern University
College of Arts, Media and Design
Theatre

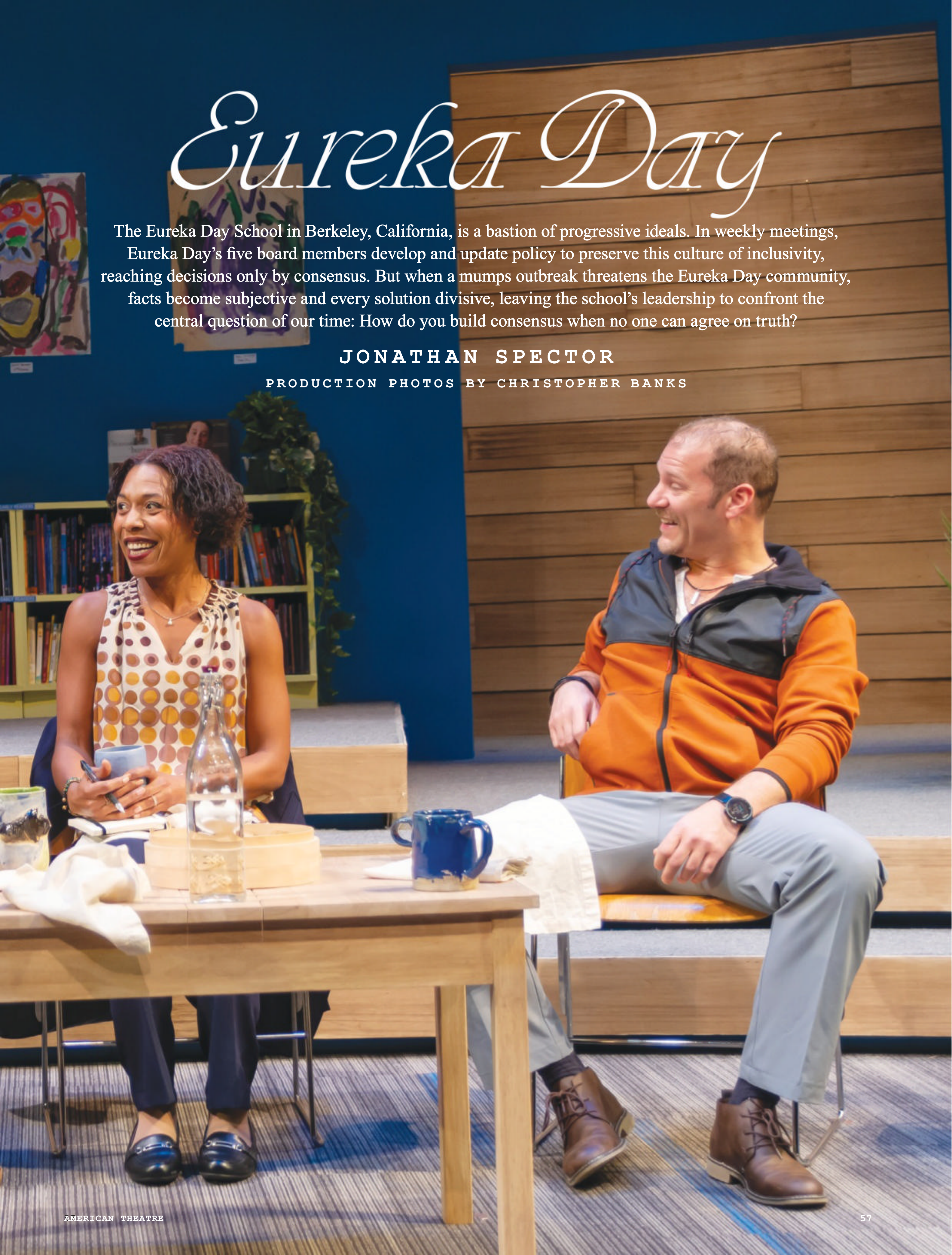
From left to right: Regina Aquino (Meiko), Lise Bruneau (Suzanne), Sam Lunay (Don), Erica Chamblee (Carina), and Elan Zafir (Eli)

Eureka Day

The Eureka Day School in Berkeley, California, is a bastion of progressive ideals. In weekly meetings, Eureka Day's five board members develop and update policy to preserve this culture of inclusivity, reaching decisions only by consensus. But when a mumps outbreak threatens the Eureka Day community, facts become subjective and every solution divisive, leaving the school's leadership to confront the central question of our time: How do you build consensus when no one can agree on truth?

JONATHAN SPECTOR

PRODUCTION PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER BANKS



EUREKA DAY

BY JONATHAN SPECTOR

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Eureka Day was originally commissioned and produced by Aurora Theatre Company (Tom Ross, artistic director; Julie Saltzman, managing director) in Berkeley, California, on April 19, 2018. It was directed by Josh Costello, the set design was by Richard Olmsted, the costume design was by Maggie Whitaker, the lighting design was by Jeff Rowlings, the sound and video design were by Teddy Hulsker; the production stage manager was Cirby Hatano. The cast was: Lisa Anne Porter (Suzanne), Rolf Saxon (Don), Elizabeth Carter (Carina), Charisse Loriaux (Meiko), and Teddy Spencer (Eli). The New York premiere of *Eureka Day* was presented by Colt Couer (Adrienne Campbell-Holt, founding artistic director; Amy Ashton, managing director) in September 2019. The European premiere of *Eureka Day* opened at The Old Vic (Matthew Warchus, artistic director), London, on Sept. 6, 2022, and was coproduced by The Old Vic and Sonia Friedman Productions. *Eureka Day* had its Broadway premiere at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on Nov. 25, 2024. It was produced by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, artistic director; Chris Jennings, executive director), by special arrangement with Sonia Friedman Productions, Wagner/Johnson Productions, and Seaview Productions. It was directed by Anna D. Shapiro, the set design was by Todd Rosenthal, the costume design was by Clint Ramos, the lighting design was by Jen Schriever, the sound design and original music were by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen, the projection design was by David Bengali; the production stage manager was Kevin Bertolacci. The cast was: Jessica Hecht (Suzanne), Bill Irwin (Don), Amber Gray (Carina), Chelsea Yakura-Kurtz (Meiko), and Thomas Middleditch (Eli).

Eureka Day *is copyright © 2025 by Jonathan Spector. All inquiries regarding rights should be addressed to Di Glazer, Creative Artists Agency, 405 Lexington Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10174, (212) 277-5287. Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performances of* Eureka Day *are subject to a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention and the Universal Copyright Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound taping, all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproductions, such as information storage and retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is laid upon the question of readings, permission for which must be secured from the author's agent in writing.*

> "'This is an important vaccine from a public health standpoint,' [Dr. Bob] writes of the hep B vaccine, 'but it's not as critical from an individual point of view.' In order for this to make sense, one must believe that individuals are not part of the public."
>
> —*On Immunity*, Eula Biss

CHARACTERS

SUZANNE: Mid-50s. White. Warm and gracious. Moved to Berkeley after college when her then-boyfriend now-husband started graduate school at UC Berkeley. Raising her family and nurturing the school are her life's work, and fully entwined. Once her youngest was in school she started working part-time as a life coach, after being encouraged to it by so many friends who she'd helped through difficult times. Has a home worth four million dollars (though she'll tell you it was much much much cheaper when they bought), but thinks of herself as "comfortable" rather than "wealthy." Mother of Sebastian, Arlo, Izzy, Juniper, Tompkins, and Walden.

DON: Early 60s. White. Head of School. A calming presence. Has worked hard to become the man he is. From New England, moved to Berkeley in the mid-'80s chasing the last gasp of hippie-dom. Started in education as a music teacher, and on difficult days fantasizes about going back to it. Has lived with his partner in the same rented in-law unit for 25 years. She makes pottery. They do silent meditation retreats at Esalen three times a year. No kids.

CARINA: Early 40s. Black or biracial. A joiner. Her parents were in the Foreign Service. She grew up overseas and had gone to eight different schools by the time she graduated from high school. This made her skilled at landing in a new environment, figuring out the rules, and putting other people at ease. Her wife is from Berkeley and always wanted to come back, so they moved nine months ago from the East Coast. Isn't sure how much she loves living here, but is working hard to convince herself she does, because her wife never wants to leave. She's worked for nonprofits her whole professional life, so has spent A LOT of time in board meetings. And dealing with well-intentioned white people. Mother of Victor.

MEIKO: Mid-30s. Biracial Japanese/white (describes herself as Hapa). Berkeley native. Wry sense of humor. Went to UC Berkeley and has never lived anywhere else, or wanted to. A landscape architect, which she's good at but a little bored by. A year after the end of a tortured on-again off-again eight-year relationship, became a single mother by choice, of Olivia. When her daughter was young, Meiko's mother was effectively a co-parent, but less so now. Would like to have another child, but feels like she's too old to think about doing it alone, again.

ELI: Mid-30s. White. Jewish or half-Jewish. Oblivious but well-meaning. From Southern California, went to

Stanford and then straight into working at a tech start-up. Cashed out three years ago, and has been in search of how to occupy his time and exercise his mind. An expert pickler, competitive rock climber, manager of family wealth. Went through an intense Ayn Rand phase in college, which now fills him with shame, but which he has also never fully shaken. When he and his wife first decided to open up their marriage, they spent many hours in therapy making sure they were approaching it in a thoughtful and intentional way. But that was a long time ago. Father of Tobias.

WINTER: 30s–50s. Person of color. A parent. This is a walk-on role with no lines. Can be played by an understudy or production assistant.

PLACE

The Eureka Day School, Berkeley, California.

TIME

Fall 2018.

TEXT

Line breaks and punctuation are primarily a guide to thought, but also inform the rhythm. They may indicate a new thought, a self-correction, a clarification, a parenthetical, an added emphasis, or a search for the right word.

A "/" marks the point of interruption.

Words in [ ] are not spoken.

Parallel columns of dialogue are generally one person slipping in words in the natural breaks in the other person's speech rather than being overlaps or interruptions.

TONE

This is not a satire. It is a drama with (hopefully) a lot of humor. This distinction is important. There's a version of the play where you lean fully into the comedy of it, so everyone is played as heightened caricatures, making Don a clown, Suzanne a "Karen," Eli an obnoxious mansplainer, etc.

If you take this approach, you will find a lot of easy laughs in the first half of the play, but you will not be able to bring the audience along with you for the second half.

These are absolutely real, highly intelligent people, deeply committed to living in a thoughtful and intentional way. It's crucial that we begin the play by loving them. If we find them absurd or annoying at the top, and think that all of their careful language is just a cover for a passive aggressive power play, the story is over before it has begun.

There is a lot of humor in the play, but you should aim for the humor of recognition, which is always hits deeper than the humor of mockery.

1.

An elementary school library in an old building high up in the Berkeley hills, designed by Julia Morgan or one of her disciples. A view of the Golden Gate or Bay Bridge (or possibly both) out the window. It's dusk.

The books are divided into three sections: "FICTION," "NONFICTION," and "SOCIAL JUSTICE."

Bordering the room is the lettering and images from progressive educational materials such as the Alphabet book A is for Activist.

Posters adorn the walls: "Berkeley Stands United Against Hate," "We Are the Resistance," "We Acknowledge that Eureka Day Is Located on the Unceded Territory of the Chochenyo-Speaking Lisjan Ohlone People."

A large banner reads: "WELCOME TO YOUR 2018–2019 SCHOOL YEAR."

Don, Eli, Carina, Meiko, and Suzanne sit in adult-sized chairs around a pair of trapezoid child-sized tables that have been pushed together to form a circle. A plate of half-eaten scones sits at the center.

Throughout the scene, Meiko is knitting.

As the new person, Carina is seated in the middle.

MEIKO

personally no
I don't find it offensive
the term *itself* is not offensive

ELI

(helpfully)
it's descriptive

SUZANNE

I think she's saying
I'm not putting words in your mouth
she's saying it's not *offensive*
but when you contextualize it in that *way*

MEIKO

I find
the best way not to put words in someone's mouth?
is not to put words in their mouth

DON

okay okay

SUZANNE

sorry sorry

MEIKO
it's fine

what I meant was
that we'd want to make it absolutely clear
that it's optional
that it's not
Either
Or

SUZANNE
right
and *also*

that the inclusion of the term on this list *at all* is
I think
inappropriate?
and that some people may
With Good Reason
find its inclusion offensive

ELI
no no yeah

I just wonder though
by leaving it off
is it possible
some people would find its *absence* offensive?

DON
you're concerned
that it could be a sort of
erasure
of people's experience?

ELI
right
if our Core Operating Principle here
is that everyone should
Feel Seen
by this community

SUZANNE
there's no benefit in
Feeling Seen
if you're simultaneously
Being Othered
right?

MEIKO
(considering)
well
no yeah

A little moment.

DON
Carina did you want to
do you want to
offer anything?

CARINA
oh I
I'm happy to defer
I don't know that I've really formed a strong [opinion]

DON
that's perfectly all right
even just your gut instinct is [welcomed]
this is an Open Room
we *welcome* your unique perspective

CARINA
okay
uhhhh
thank you

will you just
can you remind me what the drop-down menu
currently says?

ELI
surrrrrrrrrre
(pulling it up on his phone)
okay it's
the list is alphabetical just FYI
African-American or Black
East Asian Heritage
European Heritage or White
First Nations comma Indigenous and Aboriginal
comma Native American Heritage
Latinx Heritage
Middle Eastern, North African or Arab comma
West Asian Heritage
Multiracial
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian Heritage
South Asian Heritage
Southeast Asian Heritage
and

Other

A little beat.

CARINA
that seems pretty [comprehensive]
doesn't it?
it strikes me as
comprehensive?

MEIKO
a lot of thought went into it

ELI
look
it's possible because of my cousin's kids
I may have some Deeper Learning around this issue
than you all do?
so
I just think
why not err on the side of *more* inclusivity
right?

SUZANNE
so
the *reason* not to Eli would be

the term Transracial Adoptee is not [appropriate]

the fact that you are adopted does not *change* your /
[race]

ELI
I don't think anyone's saying that

SUZANNE
it's just
my understanding of that term is
is that it's a way to think about our
Cultural Identity

ELI
suresuresure

and also to think about how it
impacts

it's complicated

the way our racial identity is
formulated
and created over time

CARINA
so that makes [sense]
that actually sounds right to me

I mean I can just say as / a Bla[ck Woman]

ELI
oh oh oh
sorry to cut you off but I wonder

CARINA
no no no [go ahead]

I wonder if there's a better *frame*
for this conversation which is:
who is the drop-down menu for?

DON
for families applying to our school

ELI
no no no okay

SUZANNE
maybe a way to think about it is
if you are pulled over by the police
they don't

obviously

they don't *ask* you if you were adopted

sure

MEIKO
oh that's a good
that's actually a really a good [point]

but
also
there's the perception of our community
as we're viewed from the outside
say a picture on the website or in a brochure
of course people are gonna make certain assumptions
because we live in a racist society
that applies race as a primary lens

or
is this about how we Perceive Ourselves?
so it's more
From The Inside Out

DON
you're suggesting
the *starting point* is identity?

ELI
right right right

MEIKO
(skeptical) mmmmmm

CARINA
and isn't
I'm sorry tell me if I'm misunderstanding
isn't Suzanne's point
and I think I agree?
that we'd be conflating two very different / [kinds of things]

ELI
no no no
it's a question of *framing*

SUZANNE
I think that's right Carina thank you

DON
sounds like there's a lot to unpack here

A tiny moment.

ELI
okay here's another [way to think about it]

I frequently encounter situations where I'm
filling out a form or something
and in the way it's laid out
there's a clear assumption embedded
that if you're a Straight Cis Couple
the mother is the Primary [parent]
and just
as a Full-Time Father
it's not so much that it offends me?
as it is when people *are* conscious about *not* [making that assumption]
it's a gesture I really appreciate

MEIKO
ummmm
I'm not sure if that's really the same kind of / [thing]

ELI
no no no
of course not
I'm just saying
this request came from a parent
with a certain Point of View
and a certain Life Experience

which we *can't* presume to know
Suzanne
and which in no way devalues your
friend's Life Experience
but if we're trying to make sure
we're Holding Space / for everyone

SUZANNE
which we can't
presume to know

SUZANNE
just because one family wants something
doesn't make it right for the whole community
this is why we have Core Values
because it's always tempting
to accommodate the squeaky wheel

ELI
right!
it is

I think we're all basically saying the same thing

SUZANNE
…?

A moment.

DON
well I don't want to
I'm not *advocating* [for either position]

but it might be worth reflecting back
to a discussion we had?
I think about two years ago
there was a family
that was uncomfortable selecting "White"
and wanted to have "Jewish" as an option

MEIKO
(remembering) mmmmmmmm

DON
and my
my Probably Flawed Recollection is that
Eli
you were very adamant that

SUZANNE
that's right
you said you said
that's not what this list is FOR

A small moment.

ELI
huuuuh

okay yeah
yeah that's
clarifying

thanks Don

MEIKO
did they
Carina
do you know if they had that option at the school
where you were [last enrolled]?

CARINA
I don't [know]
you know I don't remember
I don't believe so

ELI
where was that?

CARINA
it wasn't private
we did first grade at Cragmont Elementary
in North Berkeley?

ELI
ahh

SUZANNE
you schooled at home for kindergarten?

CARINA	**MEIKO**
no we did public school	*(surprised)*
	oh
in Maryland	*(I'm sorry you had to go through that)*
	ohhh

CARINA
but Cragmont was actually a lovely [place]
and we could walk from our house but
it just wasn't a good fit for Victor

SUZANNE
(empathically) mmmmm

and you know my friend Margot says
you can always spot a Eureka Day kid because
at soccer games
they're the ones who cheer when the *other* team scores

MEIKO
that's so true

CARINA
also we
my wife and I
we just really love this idea of him being in a place where there's
such a strong Social Justice Component?

DON
it's really at the center of everything we do

and we've found that that
the culture you all create here
in this room
as the Executive Committee
truly does trickle down

to the staff and the teachers and the parents

MEIKO
it does it really does

DON
and we also want to make sure we have a range of viewpoints represented
which is why we have this floating spot
did Suzanne explain this to you?

SUZANNE
more or less

DON
one position on the Executive Committee is always held for a new parent

ELI
so we don't get too
calcified in our thinking

CARINA
well thank you
I'm honored to uh

DON
thank *you*

I apologize I threw us completely off track

ELI
no no
it's fine Don
I
I feel *heard*

we can move forward

DON
beautiful

so
there's no need to alter the admissions form at this time?

MEIKO
(nod/shrugs)

DON
Carina?

CARINA
oh sure yeah
I'll uh
(raising a hand)
I Move
that we don't change the drop-down menu on the admissions form

They all look at Carina.

DON
I'm so sorry
I really should have explained
we don't operate like some other [boards]
we don't take Board Votes

CARINA
oh

MEIKO
we only make decisions by consensus

CARINA
got it

SUZANNE
it can lead to some *very* long meetings

ELI
but we always have snacks

MEIKO
a little-known fact:
the secret to consensus?
artisanal scones

SUZANNE
and this way we can be sure no one's viewpoint gets stampeded

CARINA
oh okay
great

well um
in that case

I uh
I connnnnn
(looking for the word that means "I consensus" but realizes there's no such word, so:)
cede?

SUZANNE
(getting the joke) wonderful

DON
so
that's all of our Official Business

unless anyone has anything they'd like to bring forward?

Don waits for a moment, Making Space for someone to speak.

Eli is about to speak. Thinks better of it. Stops himself. Is proud of his forbearance.

perfect

Don reaches into his bag, and pulls out a dog-eared book.

Carina thinks the meeting is over and pulls out her phone, but Don starts talking before she can check it, so she holds it face down on her lap.

now
as some of you know
I always like to close out our first meeting of the year
with a few lines from Rumi

if you'll indulge me

ELI
always Don

DON
I thought this was a particularly appropriate way
for us to launch together into the 2018–2019 school year:

While Don is finding his place in the book, Carina quickly and surreptitiously checks her phone. Sees texts. Reacts. She had no idea it was so late.

She types a quick reply as Don begins to read, trying to be as subtle as possible, and quickly hides her phone.

(reading)
Whether you will be drowned or come safe to land
If you say, "Till I know which will be my fate
I shall not undertake the voyage"
In that case no trade at all will be undertaken by you
As the secret of these two events is always hidden
'Tis the lamp that takes fire that acquires light

Don finishes. A brief moment in which they all contemplate. Carina waits long enough to make sure he's really done and then:

CARINA
so I'm sorry I actually really need to [get going]
this was *lovely*
thank you all so much but I
I didn't think we'd run so late

ELI
better get used to it

SUZANNE
no of course
I'll walk you out

CARINA
(gathering her things)
thanks

those scones were *amazing*
where are they from?

During the following, Don starts to clear the chairs and put the tables back. Meiko checks her phone, sends a text. Eli looks at Meiko, waiting for her to finish her texting. Meiko finishes, looks up, has a silent moment with Eli.

SUZANNE
(to Carina)
oh I must take you
it's actually an incredible story
the woman who runs the place
she was this very
this High-Level Theoretical Physicist
you know Quantum Theory or whatever
got into a terrible car accident
and could just
could No Longer Do Math
there was some brain damage and
I don't know Other Trauma

CARINA
that's awful

SUZANNE
and then one day
she was watching a cooking show or something
and that
whatever part of her brain was previously able to hold
you know
these incredibly large-scale equations
was now able to
instead
to grasp *baking*

in a similarly complex way	**ELI**
	Don why don't you take off
and she just started	
coming up with	
	we'll clean up here
the Most Amazing Recipes	
	DON
Suzanne and Carina are	Oh
off.	are you sure?
	ELI
	absolutely

MEIKO
beginning of the year
you must have a ton on your plate

DON
well if I'm being honest
I do have the Kilimanjaro of email mountains
awaiting me

ELI
we should really hire you an email Sherpa

DON
that'd be nice

you know how to set the alarm?

ELI
of course

DON
okay well
thank you
Eli, Meiko
that's so kind

ELI
it's nothing

Don exits.

Meiko rearranges the tables. Eli stacks the chairs and carries them out.
A moment.

Eli reenters.

can I ask you a question?

MEIKO
shoot

ELI
did you feel like I was talking too much tonight?

MEIKO
(yes) no no

ELI
really?
'cause I was starting to feel very self-conscious about
how *prevalent* my [voice was]

MEIKO
you were fine

ELI
okay good

MEIKO
(flirty) though
I do like seeing you be put in your place

ELI
(more flirty) oh do you?

They kiss.

so
Rebecca's in Pittsburgh tonight

MEIKO
who's with Tobias?

ELI
the babysitter

MEIKO
and won't the babysitter think it's strange if you bring some random woman home

ELI
she's very open-minded
we met her at Burning Man

They kiss. She breaks it and glances around to double check no one saw them.

MEIKO
sorry
you know
I shouldn't
Olivia
she's got a little fever
I mean my mom's with her
they're *fine*
but she
you know
I'm sure she'll be asking for mommy

ELI
there's something going around
it's the change of season

MEIKO
she'll be better by tomorrow
she's *resilient*

ELI
(with innuendo) just like her mother

Elan Zafir (Eli, left) and Regina Aquino (Meiko, right)

Another kiss.

MEIKO
when does Rebecca get back?

ELI
not till Sunday

A little moment.

MEIKO
you know when I saw her at the Back to School thing
she was very
I don't know
crisp?

ELI
really?

MEIKO
yeah she said something
she was like
"seems like *your* year's getting off to a good start"

ELI

oh she was exhausted
she'd been on a plane all day
you probably just misread her tone

MEIKO

and it's really not weird for her that we're [sleeping together]

ELI

no no she thinks you're great

Meiko starts to gather her things.

so maybe Saturday?
if Olivia's feeling better?
you could bring her over for a playdate

Olivia and Tobias could play
and you and I could
play

MEIKO

do you have any good games?

ELI

the best

MEIKO

we'll see

ELI

just make sure she gets lots of Vitamin C

and Zinc
I'm a big believer in Zinc

Lights.

2.

Four days later. Lights up on the library, empty. It's early evening—a bit more light from the windows than in the previous scene.

Carina enters. Sees she's alone. Looks around. Checks her phone to make sure the location and time are right. Puts her phone away. She turns and scans the bookshelf, pulls off a book. Sits in a child-sized chair and flips through it.

Suzanne enters. Carina turns and sees her.

CARINA

hi

SUZANNE

no one else is here?

CARINA

(shakes her head)

SUZANNE

hmm
(sees her holding the book)
that's my book!

CARINA

oh
sorry

SUZANNE

no no you're welcome to it
it's on Infinite-Term loan to the school
it was one of Walden's favorites

CARINA

yeah we
we loved it too

what grade is Walden in?
I don't think I've met / [him]

SUZANNE

oh no no
Walden is in uh
in graduate school now actually

CARINA

oh

SUZANNE

yeah when the
when we first got a building
not this building
we used to be in an old church
and there was a room designated as "library"
but we had no books and no money to buy books
so all of us
there were about 15 families
we loaned all our books
everything age appropriate
Tropic of Cancer, *Our Bodies Ourselves*
those I still have
but everything else
which was a little sad at first
being home with no books
but also such a great practice to teach our kids
you know *where does this object matter most?*
on a shelf in our house?
OR
in a place where someone else could Make Use?

Lise Bruneau (Suzanne, left) and Erica Chamblee (Carina, right)

CARINA

that's lovely

SUZANNE

even now
we buy a new book
read it at home
and as soon as we're done
we bring it to the school
pretty much this whole bookshelf was ours

CARINA

wow

SUZANNE

have you seen Don?

CARINA

no

I just got here
does this

does this happen a lot
these *emergency* [meetings]?

SUZANNE

never
almost never

CARINA

great

SUZANNE

well
very rarely

A tiny and just barely awkward lull.

CARINA

hey thanks so much for Saturday
that was so lovely to get to meet / [all those people]

SUZANNE

of course
and it's not like a formal [thing]
but a lot of us are there every weekend
you're always welcome

CARINA

thank you

SUZANNE
and Victor is *such* a sweetheart

CARINA
yeah
he is
right?

I mean if you'd met him last year
he wouldn't have said two words to you
being here
he's really he's really

	SUZANNE
	that's so great
coming out of his [shell]	
	Mmmmm
yeah *it is* [so great]	
and it's not their fault	
but his other school was really	
not set up to accommodate	
his / [needs]	sure
	you know there's a lot of
	of neurodiversity here
oh	
	we really value it
actually he's not um	
he's not on the spectrum	
	ah
he's just	
he's	
he has slow auditory processing?	
so if he *reads* something	
he can understand it completely	
and he's *so* smart	
I mean that was the problem	
because his teachers	
they knew he needed specialized help	
but he	
he would still get straight As	
because he was so smart	
that he could figure out	
workarounds so	
	of course
and they said they couldn't	
legally	
they couldn't get him the	
special needs support	
unless he was failing	
	oh my god
right?	
which is insane to me but	
	that's *nightmarish*
and he was really starting to just	
to Shut Down	
like	
he'd come home from school and we'd ask him	
how his day was	

CARINA
and he would just Say Nothing
but now he can't stop talking about
the projects they're doing in class
or his friends
or the teachers or

honestly I feel so guilty
we really should've taken him out of there a lot sooner

SUZANNE
well the important thing is
you've Found the Right Fit

CARINA
no yeah
it is
thank you

I mean I still feel kinda weird about us being in a
you know
Private School

SUZANNE
oh
of course
how can you not?

CARINA
right

SUZANNE
but also
well
I like to think of us as more of a
Community School

CARINA
…sure

SUZANNE
and we *must*
get Victor and Sebastian together sometime
they'd really get along
did you meet Sebastian?

CARINA
I don't think so

SUZANNE
he's in fifth grade
(hands over her heart)
my *baby*

CARINA
wait so
you've had kids at the school for how many [years]?

SUZANNE
Sam
my husband
he has this joke
it's an absolutely horrid joke but
he says the real reason we did eight rounds of IVF
was because I wasn't ready to leave Eureka Day

Eli rushes in.

ELI
where's Don?

SUZANNE
(shruggy "I don't know" gesture)

ELI
where are the chairs?

SUZANNE
?

Eli, with a mild sigh of exasperation, exits off to wherever the Adult Chairs are stored.

I hope you're feeling empowered in these meetings
I know it can be intimidating
we can sometimes be very Forceful Advocates for our [perspectives]

CARINA
oh no no yeah

SUZANNE
it's a big priority of mine
all of ours but me especially
that there's a range of [viewpoints]
that we don't only hear from the voices of the
the Full-Pay Families

CARINA
right
(realizing what Suzanne is saying)
oh uh

SUZANNE
which is just to say
you're essential here
don't let yourself forget that

CARINA
(processing, then trying to figure out how to address this)
ummmmm
okay
Uhhhhh

Eli reenters carrying a stack of five adult-sized chairs. He begins unstacking them.

ELI
is this about the bathroom contractor?
'cause I told him we should use my guy

SUZANNE
that company came very highly recommend by one of our families
(to Carina)
they use only locally sourced materials

CARINA
is something wrong with the bathrooms?

SUZANNE
no no
we're In Process
we're converting everything to All Gender

ELI
which you'd think would be
how hard is it to throw up some extra stalls?
but apparently it's like the Manhattan Project in there
Los Alamos two point oh

SUZANNE
(genuinely trying to be helpful)
you know Eli
the Manhattan Project actually
displaced an enormous number of Native families
from their ancestral land

ELI
(not sure what she's talking about)
uhhh
no
I did not know that

SUZANNE
well
so [maybe it's not an appropriate topic to joke about]

ELI
(still not sure what she's talking about)
?

A moment. They wait.

Don rushes in.

DON

sorry sorry
thanks so much for rushing
I really appreciate it

SUZANNE

is everything [okay]?

DON

yeah yes
I know I know I'm sorry
I just

I didn't want to start a panic
so I wanted to
I wanted to tell you all first before this goes out

ELI

shouldn't we wait for Meiko?

SUZANNE

(to Eli)
did she say if she was coming?

ELI

oh
uh
I
wouldn't know

(covering)
Don, is she coming?

DON

I haven't heard back from her
she didn't say she wasn't

SUZANNE

well then
why don't you just go
ahead and and and

DON

okay

and we'll just catch her
up when she gets here

DON

great

here
why don't I just read it to you?

He reads from a piece of paper:

Dear Parent/Guardian:
This letter is to inform you that a child has been confirmed to have Mumps who attended the Eureka Day School on September 26th.

Therefore, if your child has no documentation of immunity to Mumps he or she will be excluded from school until it is determined by the County Health Officer that there is no longer a risk of exposure.

A recommended vaccination schedule is attached. Although complications from Mumps are rare, they can lead to sterility in males, deafness, brain damage, and death. If you have delayed or refused vaccinations for your child, we strongly urge you to consider this event as a reminder of their importance and urgency.

Yours,
Charles A. Kilburn, MD
City of Berkeley Public Health Division

A beat.

ELI

well
that's a little intense

SUZANNE

can I see it?

Don hands her the letter. She starts reading it.

DON

I spoke to him on the phone
he's actually very nice
very helpful

I'm heading out to meet with him in just a [few minutes]
that's why I asked you all to
and *thank you* for coming so quickly

ELI

do we know who it is?

DON

I don't know
and even if I did I couldn't
legally I couldn't tell you

ELI

sure yeah no
but how many kids are we talking about here
who are uh
unvaccinated?

DON
I haven't had a chance to pull exact figures
but I think we can say
we can safely say
it's quite a few

CARINA
really?

SUZANNE
(looking up from the letter)
can I
I'm sorry
can I just
Voice a Concern with this letter?

Eli reaches out for the letter, and Suzanne passes it to him.

DON
um
of course

SUZANNE
it's just
the way it's being framed?
if we're going to send this out
I'd feel much more comfortable if we're able to convey
that we're Passing On this message
but that this message is not the school's message

DON
it's not a *choice* Suzanne
it's going out
tonight

SUZANNE
right
and
of course we will do
whatever we are obligated to do legally
but
I just think we need to be
very thoughtful about how we [frame this]
because this is a very
for many people I think
a very private
a very personal issue

ELI
totally totally
we did the Delayed Schedule
like we got them all
we just spaced them out
and we have some friends who were like
that's still WAY too many vaccines
and other people who were like
you should NOT have waited so long

which basically meant
we got the side-eye from everyone

SUZANNE
exactly
and we don't want anyone to feel pressured
or shamed

ELI
buuuuut

I think it's probably fine
like I think people will get it
I mean it's clearly signed by
Doctor Health Department Guy
it's not like *Don* is writing this letter

Eli hands the letter to Carina.

SUZANNE
look

if we decide
if our stance is
you know
the school is going to be a resource to direct people to
to different kinds of information
so they can Make Informed Decisions
that would be one thing

but to just have this go out to everyone
and say nothing?
it feels Very Irresponsible

I mean they receive this official-sounding letter and

CARINA
but isn't it actually just like
An Official Letter?

SUZANNE
that's what I'm saying

DON
I certainly was not assuming we would say *nothing*
that's why I asked you all to [come in]

and I think you're right Suzanne
that we want to be
sensitive
about how we approach this

and wouldn't want to be perceived as *adjudicating* or

any more than we would for
religion or
political affiliation or
dietary preferences

but this is just a document we're passing on
there's no *judgment*

SUZANNE
well to me Don
what you've just said is a little like
it's like you're saying
we welcome all religions
now here's your copy of the New Testament

DON
that's
a little uh [extreme]

is it?

ELI
huh
no no yeah
I can see that

'cause it's like
is this what you're saying Suzanne?
that even if it's a message that *we* conceptualize as Value Neutral
we have to try to be cognizant of the way it's going to be received
'cause it's really more about Individual Parent's Responsibilities / than it is about what we are

CARINA
I'm sorry to [interrupt]
but doesn't it seem like
I mean of course that all makes sense

but shouldn't we be
right in this moment
just focused on
you know
Getting The Message Out?

SUZANNE
I think that's right
I think
I'm sorry Eli
but I think she's right

because our responsibility in this room is not actually
first
as Individual Parents
it's first
as Custodians of the School

CARINA
no exactly

SUZANNE
and it strikes me that right now
what matters most is
like you said
Getting The Message Out
that we are *one* community
a community of respect

and just to reiterate the principle of:
I may not agree with your Point of View
but I deeply respect your right to *hold* that Point of View

ELI
no yeah
that's what I was saying

DON
so maybe it's
in addition to [the letter]
maybe we say something along the lines of
I'm just spitballing here

that we are a school of *choice*
and a community of *intention*
that we come from diverse backgrounds
and perspectives
but that we are all in this together
and that
that it's our diversity
which is the source of our strength

ELI
beautiful

SUZANNE
and then at the bottom we could include
links to resources
and say
as you are navigating your way through this moment
here is some of the broad array of viewpoints
in our community

I could point people to some very good websites

DON
great great

From left to right: Elan Zafir (Eli), Lise Bruneau (Suzanne), Erica Chamblee (Carina), and Sam Lunay (Don)

does that
would that work for you Carina?

CARINA

um I'm not
I'm not

to be honest I'm not sure I'm a hundred percent
comfortable with that

SUZANNE

oh?
well that's

that's fine

can you
are you able to articulate what it is that's
making you uncomfortable?

The tiniest of beats. Carina chooses not to read "articulate" as a microagression.

CARINA

it's just
if we're saying
here's what the Health Department says
and then
here's something that refutes that

isn't that
isn't that taking a position too

isn't our position then
don't listen to the health department?

SUZANNE

oh I don't think so

DON

okay so
what I'm hearing is that / there's a need to balance

ELI
oh oh oh!
sorry to [interrupt]

I'm just thinking
this is such a multifaceted [issue]
I don't know if the four us can fully *encapsulate* [the scope]
and we're always talking about
looking for opportunities to
to showcase
to put our Values Into Action
so maybe this is a great moment for a
Community Activated Conversation

DON
hmmm

CARINA
what's that?

ELI
it's a
it's a bit like a Town Hall Meeting
but more participatory

DON
it's a new initiative

SUZANNE
last year
we had an Eighth-Grade production of *Peter Pan*
which
I don't know what they were thinking

so as you can imagine
there were some
Very Strong Feelings

ELI
and aside from the
Extremely Problematic portrayal of Native Peoples
there's actually a whole host of Colonialist Issues
in terms of the content
that I for one had been completely blind to
so

DON
and the C.A.C. was really
it was a very thoughtful discussion
and there were some great breakout sessions
and we ended up
we came to
what I thought was a very [good agreement]
we set the production in Outer Space
and that really solved the [problem]
I think everybody ended up
feeling really good about that

and ever since we've been
we've been looking for another moment to

SUZANNE
it's a wonderful idea Eli

ELI
thank you

DON
it could be a pretty amazing opportunity I think
to demonstrate for the students
to see how we can come together as a community
and exchange ideas around a difficult issue

SUZANNE
and if we did that
I would be willing to
would this work for you Carina?

we allow the letter to go out As Is
and
we let everyone know that before they rush into anything that
as soon as possible
ideally tomorrow
we'll be having a Community Activated Conversation
so that we can really
delve into [the nuances]

CARINA
yeah no that's
great
that sounds great

ELI
perfect

DON
you know it's like Sylvia Culman
she was the first board president before Suzanne
she used to always say
if consensus was easy, everyone would do it

SUZANNE
it's so true

A tiny moment, in which they bask in their consensus.

From left to right: Erica Chamblee (Carina), Lise Bruneau (Suzanne), Sam Lunay (Don), Elan Zafir (Eli), and Regina Aquino (Meiko)

Meiko bursts in.

MEIKO

sorry sorry sorry

ucchh
I completely could not get out of the house

I thought Olivia was all better but
her fever came back
and now her face is all swollen

I think maybe she's allergic to gluten?

sorry sorry please continue
what'd I miss?

Lights.

3.

Four days later.

It's evening, but blinds have been pulled down over the windows, to block the light from creating glare for the camera.

Don is seated at a desk with a laptop open in front of him.

Behind him, sitting on desks are Carina, Meiko, and Suzanne.

The group behind Don is positioned so they are in view of the laptop camera, but too far away to be able to read what's on the screen.

Eli is kneeling next to the laptop, futzing with it.

Projected we see the Eureka Day Live Stream Page.

DON

(leaning forward into the mic)
thanks so much for your patience everyone
we're gonna be ready to go in just a minute

ELI

they can see you but they can't hear you

DON

ah

ELI
yet

DON
got it

Don tries to communicate wordlessly to "hang on just a second." Eli futzes.

After a moment.

ELI
(to the camera)
sorry about the feed dropping everyone
we have Achieved Liftoff

Eli goes and sits with the group behind Don.

DON
all right

so

why don't we go ahead and get started?

just first of all
I want to say how much
I appreciate all of you
taking the time to be here
um
virtually[1]

(Don reacts to the notification sound, reads the screen)
thank you Karen

(he turns his attention back to the camera)
now
I know for many of you[2]
(Don looks at the screen again, see it's just a "like," and decides to push forward and ignore the comments until he gets through his prepared remarks)
and for myself
it's been a Very Chaotic
and very frightening
couple of days

ELI
actually Don
it's better for the video if you just sit back in your chair naturally
the sound quality's fine I'm pretty sure

DON
(he sits back)
right[3]

[The Live Stream conversation proceeds here. Footnotes indicate when the comment appears.

The *italicized* comments are ones the audience sees as they appear, but Don DOES NOT, because his attention is elsewhere.]

Karen Sapp[1]
We can hear you now Don.

Leslie Kaufman[2]
👍

Bryan Serulnak[3]
Any update on when school's reopening?

I wish we could be together here
physically
but we were informed by the Health Department that was Not Advisable
so[4]

just to do a little framing[5]
the way we're thinking about this is

a series of concentric circles
those of us here in this room are a tiny circle[6]

and we're going to be having a conversation
about what's happening in our community[7]
and we'll try to answer your questions
and those of you watching and commenting on the Live Stream[8]
you're a larger circle that envelops
and informs us

Also during this:

Eli gets a text. Reads it, replies quickly.

Meiko sees him do this. Gives him a quizzical look.

He looks up. Sees her look. Gives her a smile/shrug and puts his phone away.

They both turn both to the camera.

and then there's the even larger circle of the people in our community[9]
who are not able to participate right now in this conversation
and so it's[10]
all of our responsibility to to
Hold Stake for them
and bring their concerns and ideas into these circles as much as we can[11]

and also I want to say
as you're probably aware
there are a lot of eyes on us right now[12]
I know some of you have been contacted by the media
and
people are wondering
how a community like ours is going to respond to this kind of uh[13]
adversity
so
I'd like to ask everyone to just be very
conscious
of our speech and to be aware[14]
that while this is a conversation *for* our community

we
each of us[15]
as individuals
are also representatives *of* that community[16]

Guita Lakhani[4]
I think that's what they're about to tell us.

Mikeala Morse-Turner[5]
Is Hallie not on the board anymore?

Delia Perez[6]
They moved to Vancouver.

Leslie Kaufman[7]
😢

Myla Townes[8]
I'm pretty sure it was Montreal.

Delia Perez[9]
Actually we visited them in Vancouver over the summer. So I think I'd know!

Delia Perez[10]
They're really happy there!

Leslie Kaufman[11]
👍

Taylor Aberra-Harris[12]
Is this a recording or is this live?

Tyler Coppins[13]
It's live. Hence the term, "LIVE STREAM!"

Arnold Filmore[14]
In fairness, you CAN watch recordings of old ones.

Marla Nonner[15]
Chris and I and the kids are all watching!!!

Tonya Wallace[16]
Samara and Tom aren't able to watch but they wanted me to say they wish they could.

so let's do our best to make sure we all keep our conversation
truthful
and helpful[17]
and supportive

is there anything you wanted to add Suzanne?

SUZANNE
oh
thanks Don
I'll just say
as you know
this community means so much to me[18]
and has been a part of my life for so long
and I know
I *know* there's a lot of anxiety out there right now
so I'm just[19]
I'm trying to
I'm keeping my heart open to all of you
and I know that you'll all do the same[20]

DON
also
joining us virtually we have uh
on the Live Stream is Sarah Howell
who's the parent of a fourth grader and is a pediatrician
and is making herself available to answer any immediate um
medical questions[21]

are you there Sarah?

Don looks at the comments.
A beat, then:
[22]

okay!

Don turns his gaze back to the camera.

As does everyone else except Eli, who receives another text and gets involved in a text exchange, while still trying to give half his attention to the group conversation.

so
what we know right now is
we are aware of 15 students who have contracted Mumps
but it might be
it's still early[23]
we're expecting
ultimately the number may be much higher
and I wonder Sarah would you
can you let everybody know the uh[24]
the symptoms to look for?

Svetlana Givental[17]
I can see the video but still can't hear. Can anyone else hear?

Orson Mankel[18]
Svetlana, you might have it muted. Click the little speaker icon on bottom right.

Svetlana Givental[19]
Thank you Orson!

Dara Konrad[20]
Oh Suzanne!

Leslie Kaufman[21]
👍

Sarah Howell[22]
Hi Everybody :)

Pila Baum[23]
WHOA

Sandy Washington[24]
Some of those might be false positives.

Don reads the messages. He reads 23 and 24, but has no context and before he can read further back message 25 appears and he reads forward from there.

MEIKO
I can also jump in here and say
Don I know you can't say anything but I'm allowed to[25]
I mean I can *out* myself, right?

Sarah Howell[25]
symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, loss of appetite, pain while chewing or swallowing and swollen salivary glands.

so our family
Olivia had it, has it[26]
and I can say / for us there was

Sarah Howell[26]
If you think your child has any of these symptoms please contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY.

SUZANNE
oh Meiko
we're trying not to use the term "outed"[27]

Deborah Roth[27]
Is it okay to take Tylenol for fever?

MEIKO
(to Suzanne)
hmmm?

SUZANNE
it's just a bit loaded
that term has a sort of historical association with shame[28]

Sarah Howell[28]
Tylenol or Ibuprofen is fine. Just not aspirin.

maybe a more neutral [term]?

Mini-beat. Meiko masks her annoyance.

MEIKO
sure

anyway um[29]
what was I [saying]?

Darla Campese[29]
I'd also suggest ginger or turmeric? I find they work better than Tylenol a lot of the time and NO chemicals.

oh so
Olivia had a fever
that kind of came and went annnnnd
her face got very swollen like uh[30]
like when you get your wisdom teeth [out]?

Sarah Howell[30]
No harm in giving ginger, but we're looking for the fever-reducing attributes of Tylenol. Can't get that from an herbal remedy.

but she's really
she's been
she's been a trooper

you know[31]
I knew this was a risk when I chose not to immunize
I went into this with eyes wide open and
I'll say it's definitely an inconvenience[32]
but the truth is I'm really enjoying this time we're getting to spend together

Darla Campese[31]
Actually that's not true. Apple Cider Vinegar, Garlic, Raisin all good for reducing fever. This has been widely studied.

Terry Nguyen[32]
We've also been avoiding Processed Sugar and it made a big difference in the swelling.

so I think that might be one way to look at it[33]
you know?
as sort of a gift
a swollen gift to be sure

ELI
(putting his phone away and rejoining the conversation he hasn't fully followed)
what do you get for the girl who has everything?[34]

MEIKO
…riiiight

DON
(off the comments)
oh-kaaaay

so it seems like there's a

good
conversation underway online
but I am also going to try to keep us moving so

I understand there's been some
miscommunication around [when school is reopening]
so

to be clear
school is closed through Wednesday
and
at that time

only students who have received the MMR
vaccine or
who have already had Mumps
will be able to return
until the quarantine is lifted[35]

so
one thing that is going to happen
we've uh

we're definitely going to have to postpone
this year's seventh-grade a cappella concert
because
with about half our students missing there's just no way to rehearse

now the health department is recommending that you get the Mumps vaccine[36]
if you haven't already

but just to be clear
you needed to have had it prior to September 14th
to be included in the category of people
who are[37] [fine]

Darla Campese[33]
Great suggestion Terry! Also natural nut butters (almond, pistachio) may help with the aches.

Leslie Kaufman[34]
👍

Erin Catlett-Harris[35]
I made a giant batch of soup and can bring some to anyone who's sick.

Christian Burns[36]
Wait. HALF the school is antivaxxers? Seriously????

Sandra Blaise[37]
"Anti-vaxxer" is not really a term I'm comfortable with. It's actually something said out of IGNORANCE.

to not be affected by the um
quarantine

Don glances down and reads comments 36 and 37 which causes him to lose his train of thought.

so
uhhhhh

SUZANNE
I think it's worth amplifying that point Don?[38]

DON
(looking up from the comments)
um yes
which point?

SUZANNE
even if they *do* get the vaccine now
they still wouldn't
they'd still be forced to stay home[39]

so there's no
there's no tangible benefit to getting it at this point

CARINA
well there is a
I mean isn't the benefit of getting it that then you would have the immunity?[40]

SUZANNE
or you can also just get a natural immunity

ELI
but for that wouldn't you have to like[41]
have the disease

SUZANNE
of course there's a trade-off
that's why it's so important
every family gets to make the decision that's right for them[42]
right Meiko?

MEIKO
uh yeah no
I mean no one's saying vaccines don't work

ELI
oh okay yeah[43]

MEIKO
like
for what it's worth
if you're saying
have vaccines reduced diseases in the world?[44]

Christian Burns[38]
Oh well then Sandra, enlighten away!

Sandra Blaise[39]
It's easy to call someone crazy if you've never walked a mile in their shoes.

Sandra Blaise[40]
I wake up every single morning wishing I could go back to being that carefree dairy and sugar-eating person I was 15 years ago.

Sandra Blaise[41]
But I can't.

Karen Sapp[42]
Exactly Sandra! Protect your children by EDUCATING YOURSELVES.

Tyler Coppins[43]
OR, Protect your children by VACCINATING THEM.

Terry Nguyen[44]
Gotta trust your parental instincts. If it feels wrong, it IS wrong.

Absolutely
do they largely work at what they're supposed to do?
Absolutely
like, they definitely work[45]

are they the *only* answer?
are they the *best* answer?
for me
that I'm not so sure about[46]

ELI
you just mean like
it's one thing if you're looking at this from a Public Health Perspective
talking about what's best for Whole Populations

as opposed to maybe
the choices people are making as Individuals[47]

MEIKO
no exactly

CARINA
I'm sorry but
isn't that
isn't that the same thing?[48]

like
isn't the population just made up of a bunch of individuals?

ELI
I think she just means more
it's one thing when it's the 1950s and there's a polio epidemic[49]
in that case

SUZANNE
well there's actually a lot of debate about why we don't see much polio anymore[50]
you know they have evidence it had been around since the ancient Egyptians

ELI
really?

SUZANNE
oh yeah
they could tell from the
I think the sarcophaguses?[51]

MEIKO
(to Carina)
also I think it's just about being humble
you know?[52]

SUZANNE
so
as to why it had a big spike and then went away
it's not so cut and dry[53]

Sandra Blaise[45]
And we wonder about the rise in autism, learning differences, allergies etc.

Tyler Coppins[46]
Thanks for the perspective, Patient Zero!

Franny Richards[47]
Not true. She wasn't the first. Get your facts straight!!!

Bryan Serulnek[48]
Is it fair to have school open if half the kids can't be there? We ALL pay tuition.

Lena Birnbaum-Gerstein[49]
Maybe staying open for only ONE category of kids is a form of discrimination?

Alandra Garcia-Hunt[50]
Yes. Far more equitable to just keep it closed for everyone right now.

Terry Nguyen[51]
And then we could add on some Saturdays when we come back?

Sandra Blaise[52]
Or longer school hours?

Lena Birnbaum-Gerstein[53]
Maybe skip spring break?

MEIKO
like in the ’50s they recommended
giving formula instead of breastmilk
because it’s easier to digest
which it *is*[54]

SUZANNE
(to Eli)
hygiene plays a big factor probably

DON
(off of comment 54)
okay okay

MEIKO
(continuing)
but now we know how important breastmilk is for building the biota of the gut
and like
how important gut bacteria is if you want to grow up to be like a
Healthy Vibrant Person[55]

DON
(to the Live Stream audience)
can we hold for just one second and[56]
I’m just gonna try to get us all back on the same page here

so um
let me just let me just respond[57]
if we can all

(to the people in the room)
sorry sorry[58]
(back to the camera)
okay okay um[59]

(holds up his hands to try to put a slow down the online comments)
just just just[60]

(to the group, and the camera)
okay
so
I would like to respond directly to
it seems like a few people have brought up the idea
of keeping the school closed entirely
until the end of the quarantine
and just to be clear[61]
that’s not really something we’re
that the executive committee is not discussing that right now[62]

ELI
no yeah no

SUZANNE
but we could

Courtney Riley[54]
Wait what???? Why should we be forced to keep our kids home because you CHOOSE to endanger yours?

Darla Campese[55]
Actually Courtney, we’re CHOOSING to keep our kids safe

Deborah Roth[56]
Maybe we could use some tuition money for a day-camp these weeks?

Erin Catlett-Harris[57]
Great idea! And also use some for in-home tutoring?

Darrel Creighton-Bolano[58]
I’d be happy to lead morning yoga sessions.

Christain Burns[59]
Wait. Why would WE pay for YOUR private tutoring?

Erin Catlett-Harris[60]
It’s in EVERYONE’S interest that we don’t have half the school falling behind.

Reid Nuzzi[61]
WHAT????

Jamila Hayes[62]
DON! How can you make such a HUGE UNILATERAL decision without our input????

DON
hmmm?[63]

SUZANNE
I'm not saying we should *do* that
but[64]
isn't that what the C.A.C. is for
to be an open forum for people to Bring Forward ideas[65]

DON
um
I suppose

CARINA
wait I'm sorry
why would we keep the school[66] closed if we don't have to

SUZANNE
well there are a lot of things that we don't *have* to do[67]
that we *choose* to do as a community / because of our [values]

CARINA
not everyone can afford three weeks of
childcare
or taking off work

SUZANNE
it'd be a burden no question
I'm not suggesting we *do* it
I just think
we want to have the whole picture
(Suzanne gives her attention back to the camera, effectively ending the conversation with Carina)

ELI
okay so
Don if we did keep it closed[68]
would we end up needing to add days
on to the end of the year?

DON
well it would depend on how long
obviously but
I would imagine so[69]

CARINA
(responding to Don)
but also
just from a *fiduciary* [standpoint]
utilities, mortgage, salaries
these are sunk costs, right?[70]

ELI
unless it's like a
a furlough situation?[71]

CARINA
would that even be legal?

ELI
legal, not legal
that's what lawyers are for

Alandra Garcia-Hunt[63]
That is NOT how we operate!!!!

Tyler Coppins[64]
CANNOT BELIEVE we are even having this conversation!

Kate Pacyniak[65]
Typical behavior from the Executive Committee of FASCISM.

Leslie Kaufman[66]
👍

Doug Wong[67]
Okay here's another idea: what if we made the quarantine days OPTIONAL.

Orson Mankel[68]
Doug, that's idiotic. If the "problem" is that we won't have enough kids in class, why make the problem worse???

Rivka Rasmussen[69]
Orson Mankel, please do not call another member of our community an "idiot." We're all just trying to figure this out.

Orson Mankel[70]
I said the IDEA was idiotic, not him.

Orson Mankel[71]
Which it is.

SUZANNE
well couldn't it just be like
like closing for the
Jewish Holidays[72]

MEIKO
oh
that's an interesting way of [thinking about it]

During the following, Eli receives a text, sends a text, receives a text. Texts back and forth anxiously.

SUZANNE
because I recall[73]
when we made that decision

the thinking behind it was
we didn't want to single out those who would be missing[74]
to make them feel
alienated for their
religious practice
so closing school on those days was[75]
is
a sign of respect

During the following, Meiko notices Eli's texting. Gets his attention. Mouths "is everything okay?"
He nods and waves her off.

CARINA
okay but
just to[76]
um
isn't it one thing to do it for just one or two days
but a whole other / thing[77] to

SUZANNE
it's a difference of scale maybe

ELI
(rejoining the conversation, which he'd been half-following)
but I wonder
isn't it also a matter of
of planning?[78]
of uh
intentionality?

SUZANNE
I'm not sure what you mean[79]

ELI
it's about it's about
it's volitional

Orson Mankel[72]
But I APOLOGIZE if you misinterpreted.

Melanie Alexander[73]
Great analogy Suzanne!! It WOULD be just like closing for the Jewish Holidays.

Leslie Kaufman[74]
👍

Francis Alvarez[75]
Um, sorry. Religion ≠ vaccine denial

Josephine Lawrence[76]
Actually Francis, sometimes vaccine refusal does = religion.

Josephine Lawrence[77]
Who are you to question my religious beliefs???

Francis Alvarez[78]
Ignorance is your religion, Josephine?

Sandra Blaise[79]
Doesn't it all come down to faith?

stated up front at the beginning of the year[80]
so when you you you *choose* to enroll

MEIKO
you're saying
in the same way you agree[81]
as part of this community
that you're not going to pack nuts of any kind in your child's [lunch][82]

ELI
exactly

I mean Tobias *loves* peanut butter and jelly sandwiches[83]
but

DON
(catching up on comments 82 and 83, then addressing the camera)
you know I think we might be getting / a little off track

SUZANNE
I hear that Eli[84]
and maybe going forward that's something we're going to want to [address]
But
I do think there is a whole set of implicit agreements that are made[85]
when you choose to be part of this community
we couldn't possibly spell out every single assumption

ELI
yeah no for sure / but

DON
(reads comment 85, then to the in-person group)
can we just pause this conversation for one second and[86]
(turns back to the screen)
and
(reading comment 86, then talking to the camera)
uh uh okay
ooo
let's all just
can I ask everyone who's participating here to just[87]

(reads comment 87)
let's just take our fingers off the keyboards for a second and[88]

(reads comment 88, shifting to a slightly more stern, teacherly voice)
okay
let me just say

we truly appreciate you taking part in this
experiment[89]
because that's what it is
this virtual C.A.C.

and I think
and I am absolutely not trying to censor anyone[90]

Sandra Blaise[80]
Do you have faith that our bodies were built to handle these kind of pathogens?

Sandra Blaise[81]
Or faith in Big Pharma?

Darrel Creighton-Bolano[82]
As a chiropractor, I've seen all sorts of terrible things from Mainstream Medicine

Myla Townes[83]
Sorry, chiropractors are not doctors.

Darla Campese[84]
Actually chiropractors have way more hours of schooling in anatomy than Western Doctors.

Myla Townes[85]
My dog has way more hours in sniffing shit than Western Doctors, that doesn't make him a Proctologist.

Orson Mankel[86]
You want to play Russian roulette with your kids, go for it. But when you bring Little Miss Typhoid Mary to school, you put all our children at risk.

Delia Perez[87]
You're a disgusting human, Orson Mankel

Myla Townes[88]
What's truly disgusting is endangering other people's children over your pseudo-scientific bullshit.

Carlos Banyon[89]
Let's all take it down a notch guys.

Josephine Lawrence[90]
Not a guy, sorry.

but I think for this to work
we need to
we need to imagine that everyone is here in the room together[91]
so we can all be part of one conversation

okay?[92]

Don, in schoolteacher mode, waits to confirm the comments have stopped, the way he would when he's waiting for the class to stop talking.

Once he's satisfied they've stopped:

Okay

uhhh Suzanne what were you saying?

SUZANNE
I um
I was talking about what are we *choosing*
when we choose to be part of this community
what are those values?
and how do we make choices / that align with those [values]

ELI
so but
okay

so isn't part of Making Positive Change in the World
isn't embedded there the idea
that you as an Individual have agency in society
that you have the ability to make choices
and your choices have an impact on those around you
so isn't that
isn't the second part of that
that Choices Have Consequences

and part of making a choice is embracing those consequences?[93]

DON
would you expand on that?

ELI
sure
I mean
Rebecca and I chose to vaccinate
of course we did the Delayed Schedule[94]
but you know
we made that choice

so now
and as a result
Tobias is now not at risk so

which could be another way to think about it

Tonya Wallace[91]
Maybe let's all try just closing our eyes and listening?

Leslie Kaufman[92]
👍

Dara Konrad[93]
Heidegger has a great treatise on this concept. Link: www.nccu.edu/1079/heid_sch.pdf

Dara Konrad[94]
It's a pretty easy read, as far as Heidegger goes.

Risk-Reward[95]

we took that risk and now this is the reward
we get to
to have him keep going to school[96]

SUZANNE
oh my god Eli
is that
do we really want to be thinking of our children as a
like your stock portfolio?[97]

CARINA
well maybe it's simpler to just
just at a basic level
why should the students[98]
the ones who *are* immunized

ELI
right
why should they be penalized?
isn't that a sort of
Collective Punishment[99]

MEIKO
uh but
punishment implies you did something wrong[100]

DON
right
we would certainly not want to feel like we were
engaging in a form of
punishing the child for the sins of the parent

SUZANNE
can we[101]
can we not?

frame this in terms of *sin* and *punishment*
that makes me *very uncomfortable*

MEIKO
me too actually[102]

DON
you're right
I apologize
that was inappropriate[103]

SUZANNE
because an equally valid frame could be

this is an Unjust System
if the school stays open for only *some* of the students[104]

Sandy Washington[95]
The Delayed Schedule makes so much sense. Not anti-vaccine, just maybe we give TOO MANY at once.

Sarah Howell[96]
Medically there's NO benefit in delaying vaccines or spreading them out.

Franny Richards[97]
NOT TRUE! Babies immune systems are too fragile to handle 14 viruses.

Arnold Filmore[98]
The "mainstream" medical literature is ALL funded by Big Pharma.

Leslie Kaufman[99]
👍

Darla Campese[100]
There's a community in China where the entire population was forcibly vaccinated and they still had a massive outbreak of Rubella.

Erin Catlett-Harris[101]
We went to Beijing last summer and could hardly breathe!

Sandra Blaise[102]
There's SO MUCH corruption in Chinese Pharma!!!!

Arnold Filmore[103]
Just answer honestly: would you rather have measles or autism?

Orson Mankel[104]
Just answer honestly: were you dropped on your head as a child?

unch of fucking lunatics

gainst the wall.

Orson Mankel
I can't believe my kid goes to school with people whose parents are THIS FUCKING STUPID.

From left to right: Erica Chamblee (Carina), Sam Lunay (Don), Lise Bruneau (Suzanne), and Regina Aquino (Meiko)

ELI
I think that's a little over the top

SUZANNE
really?[105]

ELI
yeah

SUZANNE
well Eli
tell me this
do you want to bring Tobias over for a playdate at my house tomorrow?

ELI
what?

SUZANNE
do you want to bring Tobias over for a playdate at my house tomorrow?
if you have total confidence[106]

ELI
um
sure
he's been immunized

A moment—maybe a look between Meiko and Eli?

SUZANNE
really?[107]

ELI
yes

SUZANNE
well
you know who else was "immunized"?

the first student to be diagnosed with Mumps

Christian Burns[105]
TRUE FACTS:
Moon landing wasn't faked
9/11 wasn't an inside job
Global Warming is real
Vaccines Don't Cause Autism

Karen Stacin[106]
Mock all you want, but I saw so many bad things as a nurse.

Karen Stacin[107]
That's why I decided I would NEVER subject my children to Western Medicine of any kind.

[On pages 92–95, all four columns happen simultaneously.]

SUZANNE
I'm not going say the child's *name* Don
but people need to know
(to the camera)
these vaccines don't always work

ELI
is that true?

SUZANNE
maybe someone can post a link to this online
Merck is currently being sued for
falsifying data
and that's why you're seeing
around the country
you're seeing
most people who are getting Mumps
have been vaccinated

CARINA
Really? Where'd you hear that?

SUZANNE
I can send you some articles

MEIKO
(to Carina)
plus there is this *board* that gets to decide
which vaccines are mandatory
and many of the people on the board
also hold patents

SUZANNE
Exactly! the conflict of interest is ridiculous
And it's not like it would be the first time
Merck had been caught red-handed lying to the public
Do you remember Vioxx?

CARINA
um…vaguely?

SUZANNE
it was a painkiller but they hid that it caused heart
attacks and strokes

CARINA
okay yeah no that sounds familiar

SUZANNE
they paid out a fine of five billion dollars

DON
SUZANNE!
Suzanne[108]

(addresses the camera)
I cannot comment on
WE should not be commenting on an individual
[student][109]

but I can say
I think I can say[110]
my understanding is
[111]
there has been a case of a student

who *was* vaccinated contracting[112]
[mumps]
but I think what's really
what's going serve best us here is[113]

Don starts catching up on the comments he missed. It throws him.

which is why
which is why[114]

Don reads the comments and loses his bearings for a moment.
[115]
[116]
He attempts to regain control:

I think we may have[117]
and this is of course my fault

overstepped[118]
some initial Ground Rules
so[119]

Don reads comment 119.

okay okay
I have said this once
and I am going to say it again[120]
and I am going to say it
More Emphatically
if we can't[121]

Don reads comment 121.

please THINK that the things you say are going to be
taken[122]

Eli checks his phone stands up.

ELI
sorry excuse me just one sec

He walks away from the group, so he's not in front of the camera. Makes a call.

hi yeah
I think you should go

yeah no

no no just go right now

okay okay
I'm leaving right this second

okay fine no I'll just meet there
okay

He hangs up. Walks back.

MEIKO
is everything okay?

ELI
um yeah no
I don't know

MEIKO
what is it?
can I can I [do anything]

Reid Nuzzi[108]
Did you just say you'd NEVER TAKEN YOUR CHILD TO A DOCTOR????????

Karen Stacin[109]
The best thing I can do for them is leave their bodies PURE.

Tonya Qun[110]
That's child abuse!!!

Leslie Kaufman[111]
👍

Karen Stacin[112]
When they are adults they can make their own choices about their bodies.

Carlos Banyon[113]
I'm sorry. As a therapist, I have an ethical obligation to report any at-risk children.

Carlos Banyon[114]
I now have to call CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES.

Paula Moody[115]
THAT was not called for. Don't be such a fucking asshole.

Josephine Lawrence[116]
Breaking News: Human Beings survived MILLIONS of years before Western Medicine.

Myla Townes[117]
And half of all women died in childbirth!

Darla Campese[118]
Wake up!!! The answer is not to get another dose of a failed vaccine.

Christian Burns[119]
Remember that time I got crippled from polio? Oh, no wait. I didn't. Cause I got FUCKING VACCINATED.

Lena Birnbaum-Gerstein[120]
Your complacency in the destruction of children's lives is disgusting.

Tyler Coppins[121]
What do stupid people and dead people have in common? The dead people don't know they're dead either!

Francis Alvarez[122]
maybe IGNORANCE is a communicable disease

CARINA
wow

SUZANNE
And it's not like they're the only ones
google it
Big pharma is paying out hundreds of millions
of dollars in fines almost every single year
so the idea that we should just
"take their word for it"

CARINA
well no sure
but I think vaccines pretty well tested
by the time they get to market

SUZANNE
well that's the way it's *supposed* to work
but
oh! and actually
there's a really excellent new documentary
just been released
they got a whistleblower from inside
a chemist I believe
they got him to go on camera and everything

there's gonna be a screening in next month at the at
the Grand Lake Theater
we should go together

Don raising his voice on "PICTURE A GARDEN" stops Suzanne and Carina in their conversation, wherever they are—it's fine if they're not to the end.

Suzanne, Carina, and Meiko all move closer to the screen be able to read the comments and see what Don's reacting to.

They are in shock both by where this discourse has gone and by how freaked out Don is—no one's ever seen him lose his cool equilibrium before.

as examples of
how our community behaves and[123]

From here to the end Don reads and reacts to every comment.

if this is not going to be a
productive conversation[124]

I am going to ask you all once again to just
to STOP TYPING

and take a deep breath[125]
and close your
And to to[126]

Picture A Garden
a garden lined with
Old, Broken, Stones
[127]
PICTURE A GARDEN!![128]

and inside that Garden is a
Labyrinth

Don reads the comments, paralyzed.
[129]

this is[130]
this is [not acceptable][131]

Don becomes more and more flustered.

Okay[132]
Okay
that is really[133]
that is *really* not how we[134]

Maybe he's hyperventilating a little.

this[135]
is *NOT* the kind of language we use in this
community[136]

This is *NOT* how we treat each other[137]

Alright then[138]

I am

I am

[139]

ELI
I said IT'S FINE!
(to the group and the camera)
sorry everybody I have to run
I'll um [get caught up later]

sorry
(Eli exits)

Don's "STOP TYPING" grabs Meiko's attention and she goes over to read the comments.

MEIKO
oh my god

Pila Baum[123]
Sorry but refusing to acknowledge vaccine injury is like the GERMANS circa 1944 claiming that they had no knowledge of the concentration camps.

Tyler Coppins[124]
Ding ding ding! We have a winner! First Nazi reference.

Josephine Lawrence[125]
Fuck your cynicism asshole. We're talking about our children's lives.

Lena Birnbaum-Gerstein[126]
How many of you geniuses are aware that vaccines contain cells from human fetuses?

Orson Mankel[127]
If my newborn gets mumps, I'm gonna sue you all into your graves.

Arnold Filmore[128]
Orson, Are you threatening me?

Guita Lakhani[129]
We're all threatened by your LUNATIC ANTI-SCIENCE DEATH CULT

Josephine Lawrence[130]
Do what you want, just keep your POISON off my kids.

Christian Burns[131]
The only POISON is what's coming out of your TRASH MOUTH

Darrel Creighton-Bolano[132]
Big Pharma is the REAL death cult

Darrel Creighton-Bolano[133]
When the revolution comes they'll be first against the wall

Francis Alvarez[134]
You're a bunch of fucking lunatics

Orson Mankel[135]
I can't believe my kid goes to school with people whose parents are THIS DUCKING STUPID.

Orson Mankel[136]
*Fucking

Lena Birnbaum-Gerstein[137]
It's no wonder no one wants to play with your kids Orson. Apple=Tree

Myla Townes[138]
Let's just expose all the anti-vaxxers to these mild" diseases. We'd solve overpopulation!

Arnold Filmore[139]
"Solve overpopulation"? Wow.

DON
(pulling out the Big Guns:)
I am going to
I am going to
Count

To

Three

140

Arnold Filmore[140]
You just WISHED DEATH on your fellow human beings.

Uno!
141

Myla Townes[141]
Natural Selection.

Dos!
142

Myla Townes[142]
Or don't you believe in that either?

TRES!
143

Arnold Filmore[143]
You're an ignorant cunt

144

Leslie Kaufman[144]
😮

Horrified by the comment, Don slams the computer shut, cutting off the feed.

A Moment. They all look at each other. No one's ever seen Don this riled up before.

Don closes his eyes. Takes a deep breath.

Iiiiiii
am feeling

like this format
is not facilitating us all bringing our best selves to this conversation

Lights.

If there is an intermission, it will be here.

Arnold Filmore

From left to right: Erica Chamblee (Carina), Sam Lunay (Don), Lise Bruneau (Suzanne), and Regina Aquino (Meiko)

4.

A few days later. Dark. The sound of a hospital respirator beeps. Possibly other hospital sounds, paging doctors, etc.

As the lights rise, we see Meiko standing outside a hospital room.

Eli comes out, hugs her.

They end the hug. They sit in two chairs in the hallway outside the room. (Or stand?)

MEIKO
I'm so so sorry

ELI
thanks

MEIKO
how um
how
how's Tobias?

ELI	
(shaky) he's uh	
they have him in a	
a Medically Induced Coma	**MEIKO**
	oh
so he's	
	your poor little guy
just to	
to give his body a chance to	
um	
to fight and	
but he's	
he's stable at the moment	
and they're	
they're	
optimistic	

MEIKO
he's gonna be okay

ELI
are you uh
are you asking?

MEIKO
no yeah uh
I meant

ELI
yeah um
yeah

MEIKO
Rebecca's not here?

ELI
no I uh
she's been here for three days straight
she hasn't slept
she can't sleep when she's with him
I told her
I said
you *must* go home and sleep
so

and shower
and eat

MEIKO
thanks for
for letting me visit

ELI
I didn't want to be alone

MEIKO
sure

Some silence.

do you need me to
can I get you some food or

ELI
no no uh

Rebecca doesn't eat when she's [anxious]
whereas I
have completely exhausted the Dorito supply
from the third-floor vending machine
the second floor is
touch and go

MEIKO
I think I have an apple in my bag
maybe some roughage?

ELI
okay sure

Meiko reaches into her bag, pulls out an apple. Hands it to him.

thanks

He crunches a bite.

I used to think the worst part about being a parent
was that every fucking cliché is true
you find yourself having these
disgusting conversations about
oh *it's all joy and no fun*
the days are long but the years are short
but
I just sit there in that room staring at him and thinking
(like a mantra)
I'm so lucky I've gotten to have you in my life
I'm so lucky I've gotten to have you in my life
I'm so lucky I've gotten to have you in my life
and I'm like

why was I so bothered by that
that other people experience the same thing as me?

A lull.

MEIKO
everybody sends their love

ELI
uhhh…thanks?

what'd you all decide to do about the
reopening

I saw a whole big email chain but I couldn't really like
process it
or

MEIKO
oh we're gonna
we're just gonna
keep the whole school closed for everybody
until the quarantine is [lifted]

Don just thought
after what happened
a Cooling Off Period might be [a good idea]

ELI
right

but
Olivia's doing okay?

MEIKO
oh she's she's
she's fine she's
pretty much all better

ELI
good

MEIKO
if I had
obviously if I had known

ELI
sure

MEIKO
I just feel so completely [gutted]

ELI
look

there's no way to even be sure he got it from her

MEIKO
but still

Mini-beat.

ELI
it's not your fault

MEIKO
thank you
for saying that

ELI
(crunches the apple)

MEIKO
it's just uh
I think Rebecca might
think it is

ELI
why would you think that?

MEIKO
she uh
she texted me

ELI
what'd she say?

MEIKO
(pulls out her phone)
just

whore
(she hands him the phone)
if you keep scrolling up
like
pretty much once an hour just
whore
whore
whore

ELI

(scrolling)
hmmmm

she probably just like
(hands her back the phone)
copy and pasted

MEIKO

…right

I just
I thought you guys had uh
had
Passed Through Monogamy

ELI

we have
we did
both of us
I am capable of loving more than one person at a time
and so is she and that's

I mean
sure
we generally do try to have it be
somebody the other person doesn't know
but
she barely knows you so

MEIKO

we were on the development committee last year

ELI

no yeah but
there were a lot of uh [people on it]
it was a huge committee, right?

MEIKO

we co-chaired it

ELI

well look
marriages are [complicated]

it's hard to understand if you've never been in one

MEIKO

(hurt)
I've had relationships

ELI

okay
sure

A moment.

I can
I'll ask her to stop texting but

I can't tell her how to feel

MEIKO

it's fine
I mean
if it helps
if it makes her feel better to
I can ignore it

I just
I just want him to be okay

ELI

thanks

A moment.

MEIKO

can I
can I see him?

ELI

IIIII
think it's better that he
that he not be disturbed

MEIKO

okay

ELI

right now

MEIKO

sure

um
I guess I'll uh
I should probably go

ELI

okay

Lights.

5.

The Library.

Two days later. Don closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

Suzanne and Meiko do the same. Carina joins on the second breath.

After the third exhale, Don opens his eyes.

Throughout the scene, Meiko is knitting.

DON

great
and why don't we
can we just go around and say one word
about where we're landing right now?
don't think
just [speak]

Don looks at Suzanne.

SUZANNE

fragile

DON

(nodding)
mmmmmm

Don turns his gaze to Carina.

CARINA

um
concerned?

DON

thank you

Don turns his gaze to Meiko.

MEIKO

uhhhhh
pass

Don clocks there is something weird here, but decides to move on.

DON

sure

Don widens his gaze.

for me it's
grateful

because you know
this has been the most trying span of days in my whole work life
and

I'm so *grateful* that I have been able to draw such strength from each of you
so
Thank You

SUZANNE

of course Don

DON

and
I just got off the phone with Eli and he
well
Tobias is
he's awake and alert
and his fever's down
which is good

it does appear there may have been some hearing loss

Meiko makes a small sound of pain/sympathy.

in his left ear

CARINA

oh god I'm so sorry

and I think it's gonna be a while
before they know the extent
but he asked me to pass on to you
he and Rebecca both
how much they've appreciated everybody's thoughts
and
uh prayers
so

I will let you know as soon as I know more

okay so
it goes without saying um
that we have a great deal of work to do
as a community to
rebuild trust
and

so
our first item here is uh
I assume some of you are aware
there's a

DON
petition?
floating around
asking that uh
families pledging that
they will not return to the school unless we
until such time as we
revise our
the school’s
Immunization Policy

MEIKO
in what way?

DON
to uh
it would be
to start requiring vaccinations
as a condition of / returning to school

SUZANNE
well that is

I’m sorry I don’t know why
we’re [discussing this]
that is obviously a nonstarter

DON
I completely understand
that you [feel that way]
(to Carina and Meiko)
that is my understanding
yes

MEIKO
when they return next week or
when they return next year?

CARINA
I think it’s
as soon as we

as soon as we reopen

MEIKO
and is this ALL vaccines or just the MMR?

SUZANNE
what Meiko’s saying and I agree is this is not the kind
of thing that we can / just suddenly *decide*

MEIKO
(lashing out)
I can speak for myself thank you!

A tiny moment. Everyone is a little taken aback.

Don?

DON
my understanding is it’s the
the standard ones
the Recommended Schedule

SUZANNE
well first
I think we need to recognize that there’s a
very good chance that this whole thing
is
it’s
what’s the word
trolling?
someone who was probably
understandably
upset by the online conversation
is now

they’re trolling

they trying to Sow Chaos

DON
it’s not just one person

it’s

it’s upwards of 50 families
last time I checked

MEIKO
five-zero?

DON
yes
and also just context
I went ahead and did a little
back-of-the-napkin math
and if we were to lose even half that many families
at this point in the year?

SUZANNE
what about the cash reserves?

DON
this is including [the cash reserves]
the bathroom conversion has really eaten up / a lot of the

SUZANNE
okay well
what if we
let’s just take things one step at a time
make sure we have all our ducks in a row
to reopen next week
and we’ll see how many of these people
actually don’t [come back]
because I don’t believe that *25* families
are going to to [not come back]
and *then*
if it turns out we need to do
a little extra fundraising this year
then we will
we will
Make It Work
just as we always do

DON
fifty

DON
okay
and
if that is the consensus view then then then

but but
I do feel obligated to point out that the
the petition was also signed
by a member of the executive committee

so

MEIKO
what did he uh
what did he say?
is he / going to

SUZANNE
look
Eli is experiencing a trauma
and in a moment like that you
you lose the ability to think rationally
you are looking
you are just so desperately looking for someone
to blame
and I think it requires from all of us
to extend our sense of of of
DON
so it was not uh
empathy?
Eli was not
and and
the person who
oh

oh

A little moment.

CARINA
I'm sorry
I wasn't trying to be uh
deceptive?

I just didn't want to make this
about my personal point of view

this is a petition *from* the community
so I think we have an obligation to [consider it]
right?

and honestly I do feel like in light of what's happened
that that

plus
a number of parents have reached out to me
so it's not just my feelings
it's about
it's about
someone needs to advocate / for
for [their point of view]

SUZANNE
this is

Carina
you are new to our community
and you are welcome here
we appreciate what you bring

but there are things that are are
fundamental
to what makes our community
our community

do you know what I mean?

CARINA
ummmm

SUZANNE
so it's it's it's

CARINA
I don't

SUZANNE
what?

CARINA
I don't know what you mean

A tiny beat.

SUZANNE
well
okay

uh
for one thing
if we
changed
this policy

there wouldn't be a place in this school
for my family anymore
or Meiko's family
a lot
a lot

of people
they would leave
and then like Don said
there wouldn't be any school left for you to be a part of
so
is that what you want?

CARINA
of course not

SUZANNE
'cause that is *exactly* what you're asking

DON
okay okay
let's just [pause]

A little moment.

this is Hard Stuff folks
let's just all take a moment to acknowledge that

and also
let's make sure we keep as our baseline
that everybody here is operating out of the best of intentions

SUZANNE
no you're right Don

Carina
I apologize
I did not mean to attack
you **CARINA**
oh I didn't feel uh
you know
attacked
I've found that
in situations like this
it can sometimes be helpful to
if we back up and
rather than beginning from our *positions*
that we begin with our
interests?
because we may find
there's a lot more overlap than we were aware of

DON
one hundred percent agree

and I can just begin by saying that
my interest
is in having a Thriving School Community

SUZANNE
agree

CARINA
uhhhgreee

They look to Meiko. She's knitting.

DON
Meiko?

MEIKO
uh yeah no
agree

DON
great

SUZANNE
and
my interest
is in having a place
where all our families can feel welcome and safe

DON
agree

MEIKO
agree

CARINA
I agree

Don and Suzanne look to Meiko.

MEIKO
uhhhh
honesty?
I think we could really use A LOT MORE honesty
in this community
that's uh

Meiko drops whatever she was going to say and focuses intensely on her knitting.

A little moment where they all take in that something is off. Don once again decides to push forward.

DON
surrrrre

everything we do here is built on honesty
absolutely

CARINA
agree

SUZANNE
agree

DON
okay

oh!
you know what?
we should really be
we should really be [writing these down]
(does a "writing on a whiteboard" gesture)
sorry just one moment

Don exits quickly.

Some silence. Meiko knits.

Suzanne gives Carina a little smile.

Carina returns it.

A minorly awkward moment. They both look away.

Carina pulls out her phone and starts scrolling through it.

Suzanne turns to Meiko.

SUZANNE
Meiko
do you know [how Eli is]
have you been to see Eli?

MEIKO
hmmmm?

SUZANNE
how's [he doing]
does he need anything?
or

MEIKO
(looks up again)
oh no
I uh
not since uh

he's been
you know
he's been hard to get to a hold of

Regina Aquino (Meiko)

SUZANNE
sure

A little moment.

I just
I would've thought *you* would [have talked to him]

MEIKO
(gives a tight smile/shrug as if to say "I'm not sure what you mean")
I think probably their family just needs a little space right now

SUZANNE
of course

Some more silence.

CARINA
oh!
I brought some
I brought scones!
from the place

Carina pulls out a little bag of scones.

SUZANNE

that's so thoughtful

Don enters with a giant Post-It Note pad on an easel.

DON

okay!

As he works, sheets can either be flipped over or torn off and stuck to the wall. He uncaps a marker.

DON

Here
We
Go

Don writes the word "Interests." As he does:	*Carina pulls out some disposable plates and puts a scone on one. She hands one to Meiko.*
	CARINA
In-ter-ests	they're gluten free
(as he writes "Thriving Community")	*Carina hands a plate to Suzanne.*
Thri-	**SUZANNE** it's just you know we don't
ving	
	we don't bring disposable plates on campus
	CARINA
Com-	no no these are
mun-	recycled, biodegradable, totally organic
i-ty	**SUZANNE** but still as far as Setting An Example
(he writes "Safe and Welcome")	**CARINA**
Safe	right right I I did the research
and	this company claims and with the drought?
Wel	
	it's actually *better* for the
Come	environment than using a dishwasher
and	

Lise Bruneau (Suzanne, left) and Erica Chamblee (Carina, right)

(he writes "Honesty")	**SUZANNE** that seems like a dubious claim
Hon-	**CARINA** I'll send you the link
Esty	
	SUZANNE perfect

Don turns back to the group.

DON

ooo!
Scones!

He picks one up and eats it as he briefly admires his work on the sheets.

beautiful

okay

Carina?
did you want to

CARINA

um
safety also for me?

Don puts a checkmark next to "Safe and Welcome."

DON

great

okay
another one for me would be just
Keeping the Lights On
even without losing any students
just the fact that we've had to add days onto the end of the school year is going to
there'll be a *crunch*
so

He starts to write "Fiscal Responsibility."

CARINA
do we need to
do you think we need to
um
clarify
at all

what we mean by	**DON**
	oh no
I don't know if we're	
[using words to mean	I think at this stage we're just
the same thing]	sorry
	I didn't mean to cut you off
	go on
well just	
with *safety*	
I meant like	
specifically	
	mmmhmmm

in this context
I think that really means
making sure no one is at risk of uh
which would mean
that we have enough students who *are* immunized
so that we can achieve
Herd Immunity
which is you know
the concept
that you need to have a certain percentage [of people immunized]

SUZANNE
we know what Herd Immunity is

CARINA
right so
from what I understand
the Mumps vaccine is 88% effective
so that's why everyone needs to get it
so that the Herd Immunity can protect the other 12%
like Tobias /
for whom it doesn't work

SUZANNE
actually it's the Mumps vaccine
that's preventing the natural herd immunity from being able to take its course

CARINA
I don't
I'm sorry
but I don't think that's true?

DON
okay okay okay
I'm gonna ask that we just table this for a [moment]
right now we're focused on
Common Interests

Tiny beat.

SUZANNE
Respect
Don
would be a big one for me

DON
sure
I think we can all [agree]
that's a
(as he writes "Respect")
Core
Val
You

SUZANNE
and since we're *clarifying*?

by that I mean that
none of us has the right to tell another person
that their point of view is
Not Valid

DON
absolutely

(as he writes it)
ALL POV = VALID

great

uh
Meiko?

CARINA
I'm uh
I'm actually not sure that I agree

DON
I'm sorry?

CARINA
I just
I mean
everyone's point of view is not equally valid like
All of the Time
like if I say the Moon is Made of Cheese
then obviously

SUZANNE
well of course that's true
obviously

my point was simply
that when there's phenomena
about which there's a lot of
Genuine Scientific Disagreement
that we approach each other with a sense of of humbleness
as in
I know you're an intelligent, educated woman
so even if I have a different perspective on this
I can't just dismiss what you think out of hand
because than I would be dismissing *you*
and if someone as smart as you feels so strongly
then it's worth me listening with an open mind

CARINA	**DON**
yeah no but um	
	okay okay
and I appreciate that	
	this is a really
but I'm actually	
just trying to	this a very productive I
	think uh
	a good start

DON
I wonder if maybe
with your permission
we let this sit for now
I think we've got a good list going of [interests]
we can just start with the ones that we all agree on

He circles "Thriving Community," "Honesty," and "Fiscal Responsibility."

and we can move on to to to

He tears off another sheet, and as he talks he writes at the top "Mutual Benefit."

Okay
so

we know
we know
that in any circumstance we are going to be under
some serious financial strain
so I wonder if

if we
we could spitball a list of some
fundraising activities or or or

SUZANNE
Look Don
if we are desperate for money
we can just ask Eli for money

DON
uhh
I'm not sure that's a road we can [go down]

SUZANNE
he's offered before
we can
we can name the bathrooms after him

DON
his family is going through a very difficult [time]

CARINA
I thought he was a Stay-At-Home Dad

SUZANNE
yes
and also
like the tenth employee at Google

MEIKO
Facebook

SUZANNE
whatever
he can afford it

DON
you know what?

Don crosses out "Mutual Benefit."

why don't we just go straight into

As he's writing "Action Steps" on the sheet:

DON	**CARINA**
Act-	
	I'm sorry
ion	
	I'm feeling very unclear
	about where we are with
	the
Steps	
	the petition
	I mean
	this is
I think we're	
	this is all [useful]
In Process	

SUZANNE

I will say
what's really coming into focus for me here is that
Carina
that we're not going to solve this today
and of course our bylaws say that without a consensus
we can't make changes to any of the school's
Official Policies
right?

DON

technically that's correct

CARINA

okay um
right

can I just ask though
and maybe this is a bad analogy but
does the
does the school have a policy
an Official Policy
on the Teaching of Evolution?

SUZANNE

oh come on

DON

we don't
we don't have a *policy*
we teach science, biology

CARINA

right right but I just mean
if there was a
a *creationist* family /
then what would be our

SUZANNE

okay no please
that's offensive

CARINA

can I just /
can I please
can I finish

SUZANNE

not if you're going to
then no I don't think / we need to hear

MEIKO

just let her say what she's going to say!

CARINA

thank you

I'm just
I'm just trying to understand
if there's a
a Widely Held Scientific View
like say
about evolution

if a family
at home
if they want to believe something different
that's their right
but that doesn't mean we
because we might offend them
that doesn't mean we don't teach it, right?

SUZANNE

well
in your
your
as I said *offensive*
analogy
then I think
if ideas about evolution came in the form of a needle
that might poison them?
then I think
yes
I think we would reconsider whether / it would be our
right to inject [a student]

CARINA

okay fine
what about
how about
climate change?

like the science is completely settled
there's no / actual debate

SUZANNE

well
it is
it *is* like climate change
that's a *good* analogy
in that
in that
on one side
you have this very powerful
very wealthy industry
paying scientists to doctor their research
and
totally unwilling to acknowledge any data
that would threaten / their profits

CARINA
but if 99.9% of scientists / agree that it's real then

SUZANNE
and on the *other* side you have a
what began as a totally grassroots movement
of people saying
hey!
what you're doing has consequences
and we will no longer let our environment
or our children's bodies be destroyed
just so you can make more money
for your shareholders

CARINA
the the the government
the
you do realize the FDA doesn't have *shareholders*
right?

SUZANNE
who do you think funds the studies?
the pharmaceutical companies

I mean have you been reading any of these stories
about prescription pain killers?
because the pharmaceutical companies have
for years
have been pushing doctors to prescribe them
and they're *highly addictive*
because there were studies published in
mainstream medical journals
saying you know
painkillers aren't addictive
that's how they got the doctors to keep [prescribing them]
and the studies were funded by Big Pharma
this isn't *fringe*
THIS WAS IN THE NEW YORKER!

so when these same companies come to us and say
we'd like to inject a disease
into your one-day-old baby
to prevent an STD
which they *do*
they give a hepatitis B vaccine to newborns
I mean
no thank you!

A moment.

DON
maybe
maybe what we should have done from the outset is
just to
just to stipulate up front that
none of us in this room are scientists and
no one here is the Arbiter of Absolute Truth
but each of us does hold / *a* truth

SUZANNE
you know we have talked so much this past year about
Implicit Bias
I am feeling a lot of
particularly from you Don

DON
what?

SUZANNE
a very strong bias
against people who support parental choice
and I think it's undergirding everything you say
I'm surprised by it
and honestly?
Very Very Disappointed

DON
Suzanne
I know this is a very sensitive issue for you
I am sorry if you're feeling attacked
that was not my intention

SUZANNE
there is no benefit in exploring an idea that would
and this is not hyperbole
Destroy The School
just because [it's what one person wants]

and frankly
I'm not sure that it's appropriate
that people who are here
only here
because of the Significant Financial Support
the school is providing them /
should be dictating

DON
hey
that is OUT OF LINE!

A moment.

SUZANNE
you're right
I apologize

CARINA
I'm not on financial aid

SUZANNE
oh
uh

CARINA
we're a
Full-Pay Family

SUZANNE	
Oh	
yes no	
of course	**DON**
	Iiiiiiiiiiiiiii
	am very uncomfortable with
	this discussion
	we do not
I'm sorry	
	discuss a family's
	[financial status]
I must've	
I must've mixed you up	
with [someone else]	
CARINA	
did you?	
	that is *really* not
SUZANNE	[appropriate]
I I I	
did not mean to imply	
	let's uh
CARINA	
no of course you	
wouldn't	
	let's uh
	let's uh
	let's
	see if we can
SUZANNE	
I am so embarrassed	
	refocus
I mean this is no excuse	
I'm just *so* [distraught	
about everything]	
	refocus our um [discussion]
CARINA	
I'm sure you are	

A little moment.

DON
okay um
uh

Don casts about for where to go next. Looks around the room desperately,

how about uh

what about

He lands on:

Meiko!

we haven't uh
this might a nice time to hear your perspective
if you would be
willing to uh [offer it]

I for one would love to hear your thoughts

Meiko waves him off.

this is an *open* room
whatever you're thinking is perfectly [appropriate]

MEIKO
I think
okay
I think we just have so much *fucking* hubris, you know?

She goes back to knitting aggressively. No one knows what she's talking about.

After moment, suddenly:

the whole
faster better cheaper
faster better cheaper
and
this sort of industrial revolution
and factory approach to food and food products

She goes back to knitting, aggressively. Then, suddenly:

and the creation of *plastics*
the move towards this sort of
car
and suburbia
and all this *stuff*
all this stuff that we thought was *so* great

and then it turns *out*
a lot of these marvels of technology
now we realize
there's quite a few of them that we're like
maybe we *shouldn't*
be pumping carbon dioxide into the air by the ton
maybe we *shouldn'*t
be giving our animals antibiotics every five seconds

and
oh shit plastic's really bad for you
it's doing all this terrible stuff to the environment
all this stuff that we thought we wanted
we thought was making us *so* happy
it turns out
we didn't really know the first thing about it!

Meiko is on the verge of tears.

No one else quite sure what's going on. Is she done talking?

After an awkward beat, Don decides she probably is, and that someone needs to say something.

DON

well, that's a very interesting / perspective that [I appreciate you sharing]

MEIKO

and and and
there's all this new research?
about
they said that by looking at people's poop
they can tell
at any point in your life
if you're 80, if you're 20, if you're five
they can tell if you've ever had antibiotics anytime
in your whole entire life
because when you take antibiotics One Time
there are good bacteria that die off
and Never Come Back

and they're like
they're like
we don't *know* if this is important yet or not
we're *just now* discovering this

and so it's like
We Fucked Up
with antibiotics
and and so
maybe doing things in a new way isn't always good
just because it's new

I get so many things wrong
I get so many things wrong
and
I Don't Know
I Don't Know
okay?

I *believe* in Human Fallibility.
like
We Could Be Getting This Wrong!

Meiko storms out of the room, not wanting to break down crying in front of everyone.

A weird moment.

DON

Uhhhh
do you think she's [okay]?

No response.

I think I should uh
(points to where she went)
maybe I should go see if she's [okay]

excuse me just one [second]

Don exits.

They sit for a while. Suzanne gives Carina a smile. She gives her a tight smile back.

They look to see if Don's coming back.

He doesn't. After a bit…

SUZANNE

I am really really sorry

CARINA

okay

SUZANNE

that's not
that's not who I am
I would
I would *never* [make a racist assumption]

CARINA

well [but you did]

Some silence.

SUZANNE

and I apologize for Don

CARINA

?

SUZANNE

I mean he has so many wonderful qualities
he's amazing at connecting with people and
so inspiring
and the children *adore* him

but there has always been this way in which
well
he's a great captain until you come up on an iceberg
ya know?

Carina picks up her phone.

CARINA

sorry
I just need to check my [email/text messages, etc.]

She starts doing something on her phone.

SUZANNE

oh no
of course

Carina is on her phone. Suzanne waits for her to finish.

It goes on for a while.

Suzanne realizes she's not going to stop, so decides to jump in.

and gosh
I hope you know how much respect I have for you
I really do
for how thoughtfully you're engaging with this

CARINA

I'm just trying to be a responsible [Board Member]
to do my Due Diligence
okay?

SUZANNE

right no
of course

me too

CARINA

sure

Carina goes back to her phone. Suzanne waits a beat. Tries again.

SUZANNE

you know
it may not seem like it
but I know where you're coming from
I

my grandfather was a doctor
a family doctor
my dad's dad
so

growing up in our house it was
you respected
God
then Doctors
then
Long Spacious Gap
everybody else

Carina senses Suzanne is looking for a response:

CARINA

(barely looking up)
mmmm

SUZANNE

yeah you did not go against what my grandfather said
and that remained true all the way through
he lived to a hundred and eight!

good genes right?

Suzanne waits for a response, gets none.

yeah he passed away when I was pregnant with my first
so
never got to meet her

Through the following, Carina occasionally looks up and gives just enough attention to not be completely rude, while also doing the "pretend I suddenly have to respond to these Very Important emails/texts" thing.

he would've loved her
she was this absolutely precious perfect little baby
Juniper was
she was just full of smiles and pure joy

and *so* smart
she was you know
she said her first word at eight months
and was walking at ten months
and was just
so far ahead of all the kids
we used to joke
our joke was
because she's such a genius
we're lucky she's so good natured
at least she'll be a benevolent dictator!

CARINA
(not looking up from her phone)
right

SUZANNE
and then you know
we went in for the
the one-year shots
we didn't think about it
it's what the doctors say to do

of course
that's when they give you the Live Viruses

to a One Year Old

Carina is only half listening until Suzanne gets to "she's not talking anymore" and from then on is really listening.

and she just
from the minute she got them she WAILED
and WAILED
her skin was on fire
she cried nonstop for two days
and we would hold her and she would look at us
and she was begging
you could see she was just
she couldn't understand
why we couldn't make it better

and I kept calling and calling
and the doctor said
that's normal
that can happen
nothing to worry about
just give some Tylenol for the fever

and finally she stopped crying
but the next day
and the day after that
we realized
she's not talking anymore
she's not even babbling
and we brought her into the doctor
and he said

nothing to worry about
sometimes there's a regression
it'll pass

and she also
you know she'd been sleeping through the night
since five months
but now she was back to
being up every three hours

and finally after about two weeks
we went to bed
we were fucking exhausted of course

and I closed my eyes
and when I opened them it was morning
and I thought
I nudged Sam
I was like
did do you do the whole night?
and he was like
no I didn't get up

and there was a moment of
ah thank god she's back to sleeping through the—

and it was just that one moment
because then I
I
I
Just Knew

and I ran into her room
and she was

CARINA
oh god

SUZANNE
she was so still
so perfect

and she didn't look that different than when

but

CARINA
I'm so sorry

SUZANNE

yeah well
that's what they said too

the doctors
they did a
an
autopsy
they said

Oh it certainly wasn't the vaccine

it was Just SIDS

JUST

that's all

run of the mill
but I KNOW

CARINA

I can't imagine

SUZANNE

you can't
no

because it's like
it's like
it's like if you went skiing
and you fall and break your leg
and when you go to the hospital
and tell them what happened
they say
oh that's crazy
no one ever breaks their leg skiing
it must just be a coincidence
and you think you're losing your mind
and then you go online
and you find a hundred thousand people
who have *also* broken their legs while skiing
and *also* been told by their doctors
it must've been something else

and they are *also* tired
of being told they're crazy

A moment.

CARINA

look

I do really wish that there was a way that this could work out for both of us
for all of us

SUZANNE

oh me too

maybe what we do is
we just
let's just take a day or two and
sleep on it
I've found
sometimes if you just take a step back
it turns out things aren't as
impossible as they seem

CARINA

right

and then
we can start fresh
we can put our heads together and just really figure out
you know
how do we do what's best for the whole community?

Lights.

6.

A few days later. Late morning. Bright light. This is the first meeting to take place during the day.

Suzanne and Don are setting up for the meeting. Chairs, scones, etc.

DON

no no no
you're thinking of Marty Berman's wife
the Vegan Chef

SUZANNE

oh my god
the Infamous Cashew Lasagna

DON

it was not
she claims
to this day
she claims
it was not the Lasagna

SUZANNE

it was the Lasagna Don
trust me
the amount of vomit I cleaned up that day?

DON

wait
what did we do
what did we *do*
for lunches the rest of that year?

SUZANNE
you don't remember?

DON
I am drawing a Total Blank

SUZANNE
Theresa McClellan and Jamila Hayes and *Floyd*
do you remember Floyd?

DON
Floyd!

SUZANNE
the clown?

DON
he was a mime actually

SUZANNE
are you sure?

DON
yes he had a
a mime school in Sausalito?

did you ever see him perform?

SUZANNE
no

Somewhere in here they finish setting up and just sprawl out, reminiscing.

DON
his work was
it was actually quite subtle
he had a certain
something

SUZANNE
so they would come over to my house at 4:30 A.M.
and we would make lunch for everyone for the day
every day

DON
I had completely forgotten about that
how did you do it?

SUZANNE
I have no idea

DON
well
you were young

SUZANNE
I was young-*er*

DON
I wonder if that mime school is still open
I've always thought
once I retire…

SUZANNE
Don
in 19 years I've never heard you be silent for more than three minutes

DON
exactly!

Meiko enters. Don and Suzanne stand up.

MEIKO
hi

SUZANNE
hi Meiko
how *are* you?
are you doing okay?

MEIKO
yeah yes
thank you
much
better

SUZANNE
oh good

MEIKO
and I'm sorry about uh
last time
running out in the middle of [the last meeting]

SUZANNE
oh no no please
if anyone should be apologizing

it's me

From off, we hear Eli and Carina talking.

ELI
you gotta ask for David

They hear Eli and stop talking.

he's the one who can tell you on any given day
which of the stone fruit is just okay
and which ones are gonna like
Change Your Life

Carina and Eli enter, see everyone looking at them.

CARINA
(sees everyone looking at them)
I'm so sorry
are we late?

SUZANNE
no not at all

DON
Eli

Com'ere buddy

Don pulls Eli into a big hug.

how are you doing my friend?

ELI
yeah
okay
better

Suzanne goes to hug him next.

SUZANNE
hi sweetie

ELI
hey

SUZANNE
it must be so nice having Tobias back home

ELI
thanks yeah
it is
and he's uh
kid's a real trooper you know?

SUZANNE
he sure is

MEIKO
and how is his um
his
do they know yet
(gestures to her ear)
about his uh [hearing]

ELI
(during the following Eli tries to play it casual, but still gets a little emotional)
oh
he uh
you know
they said
the um
the the the
loss
is about 45 decibels?
in his left um [ear]
so it's considered
"moderate"
but

DON
oh
I'm so very sorry

ELI
(recovering himself) yeah
but uh
it might
kids are resilient
they said it might get better on its own or
or
(emotions now fully secured back into lockdown)
and you know

the way hearing aid technology is developing
like Quantum Leap from when we were kids
so

CARINA
I've heard that

DON
it really means a great deal to us
that you made the space to be here
given everything that you're [dealing with]

ELI
I figure
best way to get back to normal
is to get back to normal, right?

SUZANNE
it usually is

Suzanne starts to move to sit in one of the chairs, and the others follow suit, except for Eli.

ELI

(back to Meiko) speaking of which
I know Tobias has been
really missing Olivia

MEIKO

(that's sweet) aww of course

ELI

maybe we could get them together
for a little play date?

MEIKO

(realizing what he means) oh
uhhhhhhh

ELI

I just know they'd really love to
(in just a slightly flirtatious way)
spend some time together

MEIKO

(coldly polite)
well
why don't I reach out
to Rebecca

and we can set something up

ELI

ah
(surprised, hurt)

sure
whatever you
want

Don, Suzanne, and Carina are aware they are witnessing SOMETHING awkward happening between Eli and Meiko.

Don decides he will save the day.

DON

well I can say what *I* want
is to Get This School Open again

SUZANNE

I think we can all agree on that

Eli takes his seat. Everyone settles.

DON

so
I was thinking this morning about a student
11, 12 years ago
he'd just come in from a very buttoned-up East Coast Prep School type [of place]
and had a lot of trouble adjusting
lashing out
being very aggressive

and we brought the parents in for a meeting
and they were expecting
I could tell
for me to come down Very Hard on their child

but I told them
I said
your son is doing
exactly what he is supposed to be doing
taking into account his age and experiences
which was not to say we condoned his behavior
but the important point was

and this was when it crystallized
We Do Not Turn Our Children Into Villains

and that's really become a bedrock for me
of what we do here

now
I know this may be a difficult conversation
but I'm gonna ask that we all hold onto One Idea:

No One In This Room Is A Villain

and we all want what's best for the school

SUZANNE

absolutely

DON

okay

great

Don gestures to the group that the floor is open.

Some silence. Everyone waits. Suzanne tries to be generous and leave space to let someone else start. No one does.

Eli picks up a scone and attempts to eat it in as unobtrusive a way as possible.

Since no one else talking, Suzanne takes the plunge.

SUZANNE

I can
I can start
if that's okay with everybody?

ELI
(munching)
go for it

SUZANNE
so
I had a thought
which was
what if we created a network?

for all the families that choose not to vaccinate
and if one child becomes symptomatic
or if there's an outbreak in the region
we would
proactively
keep our children home until the whole thing passes

MEIKO
like a phone tree?
someone calls you
you call these other [people]

SUZANNE
right

ELI
there's probably an app for that

SUZANNE
of course there is!

so
would that
would that [satisfy everyone?]

Carina waits to see if anyone else will, when they don't:

CARINA
I'm sorry but

SUZANNE
hmmm?

CARINA
it's just
that wouldn't really
it wouldn't really *solve* the [problem]

ELI
no right
good point
with incubations periods and

CARINA
exactly

MEIKO
well but
it could still be a part of
of
whatever we [decide]

like
Layers Of Protection

ELI
totally

DON
okay

great

SUZANNE
and that's just one idea
I am open
I think we all are open to hearing any [idea you have, Carina]

our job is to balance everyone's interests

ELI
my therapist says life is one long cost-benefit analysis

MEIKO
(not joking)
you need to get a new therapist

ELI
(existentially considering)
maybe

Tiniest of beats in which they all clock that awkward moment, but move forward.

SUZANNE
and Carina
I want to say
I've been doing of thinking about what you said
and soul searching

CARINA
me too
I mean
I've been doing a lot of thinking
and reading

SUZANNE
that's great

CARINA
there's a
there's a lot of information out there

MEIKO
there is *so much*

ELI
plenty of studies show
too much information
is actually worse than not enough
in terms of optimal decision-making

CARINA
…riiight
and so like
I am not an expert
but um
I keep thinking about
this court case?

do you all know about the Vaccine Court?

Nonverbal responses to say they don't know from everyone, except for Suzanne, who is quizzical.

it was this special court the government created
for when someone has a bad reaction to a vaccine
to adjudicate and compensate
and
I read about this famous case
it was set up to be like the Test Case
for future lawsuits?
parents who said their child got autism from the MMR

and they testified how
before the vaccine their child was absolutely normal in every way
and once he got it
all these things started happening

SUZANNE
it's very common

CARINA
right so
but because it was a court
they had to like
Present Evidence
and it turns out there were notes
Doctor's Notes from the
the six-month checkup and the nine-month checkup
saying
"this could be something to watch out for"
"this could be an early indication of developmental…"
and the parents they just
they had no memory of this and they
that's the thing
I don't think they were lying
I think their pain was absolutely real
I think they 100% believed what they were saying

but our memories can be such unreliable things
especially when there's been a trauma / and

SUZANNE
okay [stop]

CARINA
and I'm not trying to say that / what you
[said happened isn't what happened]

SUZANNE
okay okay stop

CARINA
it's just
for me
it doesn't change what the science says
it doesn't change what the facts say

and even if it did
then
just from a Social Justice Perspective
what we'd be saying is
I'm not willing to subject my child to even the tiniest amount of risk
so that we can protect people's elderly parents with cancer
or
or
a newborn baby sibling

I mean
is that really the kind of community any of us would want to be a part of?

Another moment.

DON
can I just acknowledge
how much I / appreciate all of you

SUZANNE
(holding up a hand to cut him off)

Don Don just don't

Don stops talking.

Carina
why do you send your child to a private school?

CARINA
what?

SUZANNE
why do you send your child to a private school?

CARINA
because it's, it's the best environment / for [our son]

SUZANNE
no of course
but just from a
from a Social Justice Perspective
wouldn't the most equitable thing be
if we all went to Public School

CARINA
yes
probably

SUZANNE
because there's no question
the schools would improve radically
the pressure that would be exerted to fund them better
I mean can you imagine?

CARINA
you don't send your children to Public School

SUZANNE
no
because I
and I won't apologize for it
I believe my first responsibility is to *my children*
and so does everyone in this room!

CARINA
no yeah
you're right
it's just

A tiny shift. She knows there's no point in arguing further.

look
I'm sorry

SUZANNE
no listen
I am sorry

if you stand by that petition
and you choose to leave the school then
then I am sorry
we couldn't find a way
to make you feel like there's
a place for you here
I really am

CARINA
oh uh

it makes me feel like a failure
like our
process is a failure
but

it's uh it's uh [not
like that]

we're gonna have a really tough year ahead
but we're gonna make it
I know we will

and if you decide
at some point that you want to come back
I know we all will do our best
to make sure that our doors are always open for you

A tense moment.

ELI
so just in terms of making it
through a difficult year?

Rebecca and I talked it and over and
we would like to support the school
financially
however much is [needed]

DON
Oh Eli that's very moving
Your commitment to this / [community]

ELI
yeah
though uh
the one thing is
it would be
on the condition
that we
that we *change* our policy

SUZANNE
uh huuhhh

ELI
yeah
I just feel like
and Rebecca [does] too
after what happened
that it wouldn’t be ethical for us to make that donation
otherwise
so

Eli meets Suzanne’s gaze for a second then looks again at the floor.

SUZANNE
well
Eli
I am so sorry for what your family has gone through
truly
and we appreciate your generosity
but you are not thinking clearly

and even if you were
this does not look like consensus to me
because I don’t see my position changing
or Meiko’s position
so

MEIKO
well
actually

Suzanne whips around to look at her.

MEIKO
with um
with Tobias
it does seem like **SUZANNE**
wait
maybe
what are you
maybe we do need to
[think about changing the policy] what are you
I mean I’m not saying [saying]
I feel 100% good about it

but
but

and also
I realized that
thinking about like
what is the story I’m going to tell Olivia
about
about all of this
’cause I can tell her that
that
there’s some like
Decades-Long Worldwide Conspiracy
SUZANNE
oh Meiko
of all the scientists and doctors
no
’cause *everyone* is for sale

or
or

I can tell her that
yes
there *are* some people are like that
and there are a lot of people who make mistakes
all the time
but that most people
in most places
are basically trying to do the right thing

and and
maybe I’m wrong about that but
I need to be able to give her that
the hope
that the
the Good Faith version
that *that’s* the kind of world we live in

so
yeah
I told Carina
if
if this is what feels like the best way to go then
then I think

SUZANNE
you you *told* her

when?
MEIKO
when
uhhhh
oh
we were [talking]
ohhhh
okay
just
so you all
got together and had
some sort of secret *cabal*
no no no
and
it was just a one on one

SUZANNE

Don
are you hearing this?
I mean
is this really who we are now?
chasing the whims
of whoever writes the biggest check?

DON

no
of course not

but I will say
what I'm hearing is
and please correct me if I'm wrong
that
for some of the people in this room
it's not about the money?

ELI

yeah no
the money is
whatever

this is about [the bigger issue]
but
we understand
you have some really intense feelings around this
we all respect that

MEIKO

just personally
I have so much anxiety about the idea of Olivia getting her [shots]
so I get it
I really do

SUZANNE

Meiko
respectfully
no you don't

CARINA

look
we know
we know
this puts you in the most impossible position
but maybe
it's like you said
we have to put the community first
right?

SUZANNE

(in disbelief she twisted her own words back to her like that)
…

ELI

no yeah 'cause like
it seems to me
that the three of us
are pretty much on the same page here

MEIKO

and of course we know you still have a voice here

SUZANNE

I still have a voice?
how generous of you

well fine
My Voice Says No
okay?

our bylaws state that to change a policy
we Must Have A Consensus

we have no consensus
which means nothing is going to change

right?

so
it seems to *me*
that we are done with this topic

can we Please Move On

A very long moment. An unbreachable impasse.

Then Don pulls some stapled papers out of a folder (or his satchel?).

DON

well I don't want to
I'm not *advocating* [for either position]

but just so we're all working off the same set of facts

it might be worth noting that
while our bylaws do state
that we can't change a policy without a consensus
the uh
the bylaws *themselves*
can be changed
by majority vote

From left to right: Sam Lunay (Don) and Lise Bruneau (Suzanne)

SUZANNE
what?

DON
I have copies if anyone [needs one]

Don passes the papers around. People take one in pass it around to each, except Suzanne who does not take a copy.

SUZANNE
wait wait

are you telling me you're a part of this
this
scheme
Don?

DON
let's remember

No One Here Is A Villain

SUZANNE
Oh My God

Eli, Meiko, and Carina read the pages.

DON
it's the third page
first paragraph

Suzanne stares at him in disbelief.

MEIKO
(reading it) oh yeah

you're right

CARINA
(reading) huh
you know
I've been on a ton of boards
and it's so funny how nobody ever actually like
reads the bylaws

ELI
totally

SUZANNE
if this is how you want to operate
maybe you three should just go off and make your
own school
you can take that *snake* with you

A moment. Don opens his mouth to speak, but stops himself, not sure what to say.

Suzanne recalibrates.

if you do this

people will know
people will know
what happened in this room

because
because [this is a betrayal of our values]

and I know some of you are not aware of this
but the reason we work by consensus
is not cause it *feels* good
it's because we made a *choice*
to model for our children
the kind of world we want them to have

now
if anyone here is actually willing to engage in a Good Faith Process
then I will stay in this room as long we need to
so we can find our way forward
together

Lights.

7.

One year later.

Don stands, holding his Rumi book.

Eli, Meiko, Carina, and Winter seated around the child-sized tables. As the new person, Winter is seated in the middle.

The banner now reads "WELCOME TO YOUR NEW SCHOOL YEAR."

DON

so
as some of you know
I always like to close out the first meeting of each new school year
with a little help from Rumi
if you'll indulge me

ELI

we live to indulge, Don

Don, reading:

Sam Lunay (Don)

DON

The world was a night, and we, travelers in the dark
Till the sun arose and cried
"Begone, Oh slumber; Welcome Oh pure light!"
Now the eye sees how to distinguish colors
It sees the difference between rubies and pebbles
The eye distinguishes jewels from dust
Hence, it is dust makes the eyes smart

He closes the book. Contemplates for a brief moment.

Maybe Winter surreptitiously checks the time on her phone.

this passage felt appropriate today
because I think it's important to begin in a place of humbleness and gratefulness

we have an awesome responsibility
those of us in this room
to see that the school community is
healthy and vibrant
and that everyone's voice is heard

is there anything you wanted to add, Carina?

CARINA

oh
thanks Don

briefly
I'll just say
thank you for the trust you're putting in me as we start the new year
and I will strive to live up to that trust
and responsibility
as best I can

MEIKO

it's all any of us can do

DON

I also want to acknowledge that
not everyone is continuing with us on this journey
and that's okay

because for the people in this room
and the people outside of this room for whom we're holding stake
we navigated some very choppy waters together last year
but I think we've come out on the other side as a stronger community

and that's why I believe with all my heart
it's going to be clear skies and smooth sailing
as we launch together into the 2019–2020 school year

As the lights fade, they linger for a barely perceptible moment on the bookshelf which once contained Suzanne's "Infinite-Term Loan" books. It is now empty.

End of Play

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Jonathan Spector's plays include *Eureka Day* (Glickman Award, Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award, Theatre Bay Area Award, Rella Lossy Award, WhatsOnStage Award Nomination), *This Much I Know* (Glickman Award, Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award, Edgerton Foundation New Play Award), *Best Available*, *Good. Better. Best. Bested.*, and *Birthright*. His work has been produced on and Off Broadway, regionally, and abroad, with Manhattan Theatre Club, The Old Vic/Sonia Friedman Productions, Aurora Theatre Company, Colt Coeur, Syracuse Stage, Asolo Rep, Hampstead Theatre, Theater J, Shotgun Players, InterAct, Miami New Drama, Mosaic Theater, the State Theatre of South Australia, and Burgtheater (in German translation). He has developed work with Ashland New Plays Festival, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor, PlayPenn, New Harmony Project, Portland Center Stage JAW New Play Festival, and South Coast Rep, among others. Jonathan has been a Playwrights' Center Core Writer, Playwrights Foundation Resident Playwright, TheatreWorks Core Writer, and MacDowell Fellow. He is currently working on commissions for Manhattan Theatre Club, Roundabout, La Jolla Playhouse, and Miami New Drama. Jonathan is a graduate of the tragically besieged New College of Florida and lives in Oakland, California.

JONATHAN SPECTOR: WHAT THE PLAY WANTS

An interview with the playwright

BY ANNA D. SHAPIRO

Photo by Cheshire Isaacs

Jonathan Spector's play *Eureka Day* follows several contentious parents' meetings about vaccine policies at a Berkeley private school. Originally staged in 2018, the play is currently running on Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club. Spector spoke before rehearsals began (and before Election Day) with the play's director, Anna D. Shapiro, as she recovered from Covid.

ANNA: Talking to you from my Covid sick bed, it made me think about this play and how long you've been living with it and where it started, and where you find yourself as it's about to go to Broadway. Have the questions shifted? Has your focus shifted?

JONATHAN: In a weird way, it's the same and it's very different. When I began working on it, I was really just trying to write a very Berkeley play about a very specific place and a very specific group of people. The reason vaccine skepticism seemed like an interesting thing to explore was because, at that time, it was the one issue where you could have people who basically all agree about everything except for this one thing. In doing research, I had spent a lot of time in the dark recesses of weird message boards and grappling with strange beliefs people had. This was also in the lead-up to the 2016 election, so it was also a scary moment of realizing how the whole country was living in these two very separate realities. So that was informing it. But it still felt very particular to the place, and also to an issue that, unless you happen to have school-age kids or a new baby, you probably didn't spend a lot of time thinking about. It felt very private—like, this is a play for Berkeley, about Berkeley, made by people in Berkeley, on an issue I had become obsessive about but most people don't really care about that much.

To have it sort of explode out to be, like, an issue the entire world is obsessed with was very strange. Although there's also a way in which this may be a perfect Goldilocks moment to be doing it. In the pre-Covid period, it had three or four productions, and people at that time were more able to see the vaccine debate as sort of a metaphor for democracy and society. Two years later, when theatre was just coming back, it seemed like all anybody could see was it being somehow a play about Covid. But now we're in this very weird place where we're "over" Covid—but obviously not, since you have it—and we're trying to navigate this strange space of making choices, individually and collectively, about balancing the needs of society to get back to life and the need to allow people who are immunocompromised to exist in society. We're in this place of nobody really being sure anymore what the answers are to those questions, and everybody kind of navigating it differently, and people still feeling very intensely on one end of the spectrum or the other about what everyone should be doing. I think that makes it an interesting time to do the play.

ANNA: In reading and rereading the play, it's reminding me how linked now our identity is to our belief, and the crisis that exists around that. Where is nuance allowed? How do we stay away from dogmatism? I feel like that's what the play wrestles with.

JONATHAN: Yeah, and with how these past eight years have changed us—the acceleration of how media and technology work, and how the algorithms create a reinforcing mechanism that makes us believe that almost everybody thinks exactly like we do about everything. This makes it much more jarring than it used to be to encounter somebody who doesn't think like you do. It's hard to remember, but I feel like 15 years ago, you would talk to somebody at an airport bar and you did not assume you were gonna have the same view about anything, whereas now I think we become very apprehensive about people who don't believe the things that we believe. There's the concern of where this whole chain of belief is going to lead; if you believe that the health risks of vaccines are being hidden as part of an enormous conspiracy, what else could you potentially believe? If you're in a conspiracy theory frame of mind, then you're supporting Robert F. Kennedy for president, and then suddenly you're supporting Trump because he's endorsed him. It's a very easy slippery slope to fall down. But of course, everybody feels that way about everybody else.

ANNA: Has there been anything surprising to you in the responses to the play, or anything you heard from audiences that made you change things in it?

JONATHAN: I don't know if it surprised me, but I didn't know how people who don't vaccinate their children would respond to the play. I have mostly been pleasantly surprised that those people feel like, "Yes, my point of view is represented authentically—I feel like everybody's ganging up on me all the time and not treating me fairly, and that's what's shown in the play." I appreciated that. I would rather hear that than somebody say, "Oh, these are all bad straw-man arguments, that's not what I really think."

Something I've been thinking about, but I don't know what to do with, is the range of responses based on where the play has been done. It's such a gift to get any production of any play at all, it's this incredible privilege to have had multiple productions that I've gotten to be involved with and learn from and think about. In the very first production in Berkeley, it was such a lovely little gem, and so well received. But the question I had was: Is it just because people like seeing themselves onstage? Is anybody else outside of Berkeley going to connect with the play? When we did it in London—and this is partly about what was going on in their culture at the time with lockdown, their own cultural fights, and their perception of the U.S.—there was a lot of agreement that this was an exaggeration of liberals in California; that this isn't how people really act. I think they don't really understand Americans as much as they like to think they do. Then the play had a German-language production that was very stark and strange, and all the reviews there were like, "This is about democracy."

ANNA: I've watched you, Jonathan, in notes, in meetings—whenever anybody wants to get you to lock down to an unnuanced position, you gently, lovingly, and earnestly explain to them that that's not your interest. You have fought the good fight with that. I think you want people to be their best selves when you don't let them reduce the play to a position.

JONATHAN: Whenever you're writing anything that has any kind of political valence, the danger is always that you're gonna offer up some neat answer on a platter—which leaves no space for the audience. It feels false, because we know life is messier than that. I've had a number of people say they were surprised to learn the play was written before Covid. But I could never have written this play after Covid, when vaccination was a thing everybody was talking about it, thinking about it, it's on every podcast and every news show and article, so you can't have your own thoughts. It's too much in the zeitgeist.

The weird part of talking about plays in this way—about the intellectual ideas and themes—is that it feels very orthogonal to the actual play itself or the creation of it. When you're working on the play, most of your attention is spent on questions like, are you carrying the energy organically from this moment to the next moment without letting it drop? People ask what your intention was, or what you're trying to communicate, what you want the audience to take away. The problem is, if you're writing a play, you start out with whatever intentions you have, but if the thing has any life to it, it begins to assert its own needs. It might be that you really want it to go this way, but it needs to go that way. There are always times in writing a play where I feel like there's this idea or this point I would really love to articulate somewhere in the play, but then you discover there just is no space for it. And when you try to shove it in, it breaks something. So I need to accept that the play gets to have what it wants versus forcing it to have what I want.

ANNA: Liveness is the best part of doing a new play, because once the actors do join us, the outcome does actually have to shift a little bit. It doesn't change the what of what you're doing. It just changes the how of what you're doing.

JONATHAN: There's a change I made to the end of the play for our production, and as with any good rewrite, you think: "Oh, this is so obvious, I'm so stupid for not having thought of it sooner." And then later I realized: That note this rewrite is responding to was actually articulated to me 1,000 different ways. An actor friend of mine said something about the final moment at the first preview of the first production, and people have been sort of giving a note like that all the way along. It just took a long time to figure out what that meant. If you're hearing a note about the same moment, people are responding to something real. They just very rarely can tell you specifically what the thing is they're responding to.

ANNA: Exactly. People's notes are also sometimes their wishes for what the play should be. I watch writers wrestle with: Is this a note for my play, or a wish of the giver? There's been a lot of that with *Eureka Day*. I've watched the play tap into people's deep shit, and they will give you a note that's not connected to what you've written at all. I know that's probably frustrating for you when that happens, but for me, as the director, it's thrilling, because I know what's starting to happen in the early observers of our process is that something is being really activated in them, and they're desperately reaching to you to help them deal with it.

JONATHAN: The most out-of-body experience I've ever had in the theatre was during the first preview of this play. I really did not understand how that livestream scene works, and none of us working on the production had any idea that the audience was going to respond in the way they did. They were laughing so intensely that you could not hear a single word onstage for the whole scene. I don't know how those poor actors even got through it. You just cannot understand what a play is until you have an audience. •

We're proud to champion bold and innovative work by unparalleled artists.

Thank you, theatremakers, for bringing such creativity to our world.

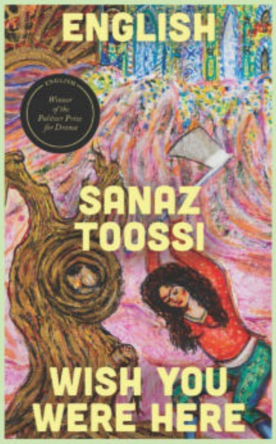
LET'S MAKE THEATRE HAPPEN.

concordtheatricals.com
@concordshows

concord theatricals

R&H THEATRICALS SAMUEL FRENCH Tams THE ALW COLLECTION

NEW FROM TCG BOOKS


ENGLISH
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama
SANAZ TOOSSI
WISH YOU WERE HERE

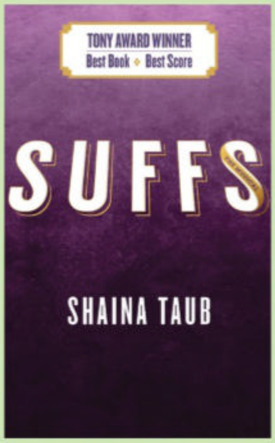
ENGLISH/WISH YOU WERE HERE

by Sanaz Toossi

$18.95 | 978-1-63670-190-5

WINNER OF THE 2023 PULITZER PRIZE

“Elegantly crafted and invigoratingly funny.” —*Washington Post*

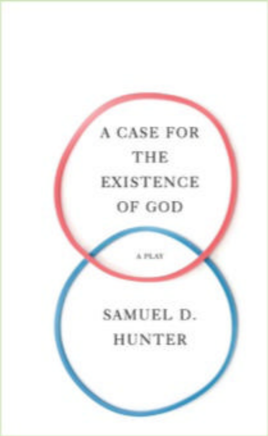

TONY AWARD WINNER
Best Book ◆ Best Score
SUFFS
SHAINA TAUB

SUFFS

by Shaina Taub

$17.95 | 978-1-63670-226-1

“Remarkable, epic…A genuine tour de force.” —*Variety*

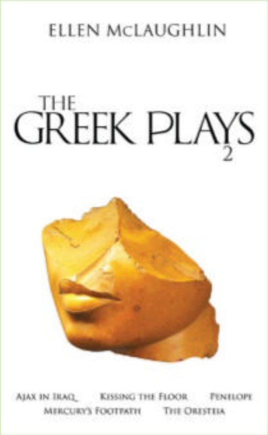

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
A PLAY
SAMUEL D. HUNTER

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

by Samuel D. Hunter

$15.95 | 978-1-63670-194-3

“Samuel D. Hunter’s heartbreaking new play argues for hope even in the face of extreme disappointment.”—*The New York Times*

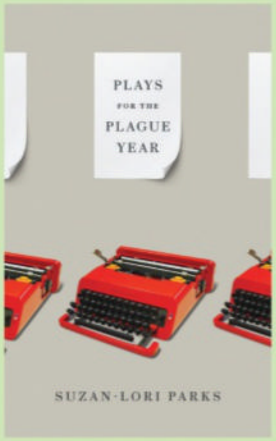

ELLEN McLAUGHLIN
THE GREEK PLAYS 2
AJAX IN IRAQ
KISSING THE FLOOR
PENELOPE
MERCURY'S FOOTPATH
THE ORESTEIA

THE GREEK PLAYS 2

by Ellen McLaughlin

$26.95 | 978-1-55936-991-6

“Reminds us that a 2,400-year-old work can still feel appallingly familiar.”—*New York Times*


PLAYS FOR THE PLAGUE YEAR
SUZAN-LORI PARKS

PLAYS FOR THE PLAGUE YEAR

by Suzan-Lori Parks

$19.95 | 978-1-63670-181-3

“The most successful dramatist of the avant-garde working today.”
—Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

TCG MEMBERS GET 40% OFF

Available online at IndiePubs.com or wherever fine books are sold.

tcg
Theatre
Communications
Group

Theatre Communications Group is grateful to the many generous donors who make it possible for TCG to serve and lead for a just and thriving theatre ecology.

SUSTAINING DONORS ($10,000+)

Institutions

Bloomberg Philanthropies

Distracted Globe Foundation

Doris Duke Foundation

The Ruth Easton Fund of the Edelstein Family Foundation

Edgerton Foundation

The Field Foundation of Illinois

Ford Foundation

Howard Gilman Foundation

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The Joyce Foundation

Mellon Foundation

National Endowment for the Arts

New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

The New York Community Trust

New York State Council on the Arts

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

Richenthal Foundation

The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation

The Shubert Foundation

Theater League of Kansas City

Walder Foundation

The Wallace Foundation

Walt Disney Imagineering

Willa Kim Estate

William & Eva Fox Foundation

Individuals

Eve Alvord
James Chosy
Eleanor Cook Nolan
John Fontillas
Jeffrey Gural
Joan MacKeith
Kevin McCollum
David Moore, Jr
Julie Morris
Betsy Pitts
Lauren Reid
Arthur Rock
Rusty Rueff
Andy Snyder
Robert E. Wankel

SUPPORTING DONORS (UP TO $9,999)

Institutions

April 8 Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation

Furthermore: a program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund

Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation

McKnight Foundation

Opportunity Fund

Venturous Theater Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation

Individuals

Steve Abrams
Janice M. Adams
Pat Adams
William Adler
Marcella Allen
Robert C. Anderson
Rachel Antonoff
Ricardo Araiza
Arnold Aronson
Chris C. Babb
Kathy Baker
Leslie Barrett
Dr. Quenna Lene Barrett
Jenny Bates
Sydney Beers
Vinita Sud Belani
Jillian Bell
Miles Benickes
Joseph Benincasa
Zak Berkman
Jessica Bird Beza
Dennis Bielat
Jennifer Bielstein
Stuart Billmeier
Kevin Bitterman
Julie Boardman
Gigi Bolt
Jeffrey D. Bores
Ethan T. Bowen
Phoebe Bowers
Amber Bradshaw
Michelle Branch
Jim Bredeson
Brian Brooks
J. Nicole Brooks
Arvin Brown
Kermit Brown
Pa Brown
Diana Buckhantz
Hilary Buffum
James Bundy
Kandi Burruss
Giselle Byrd
Stephanie Anne Ladrera Camba
Robert E. Campbell
Vernon W. Campbell
Ana María Campoy
Kristin Caskey
Fran Charnas
J. Kerry Clayton
Douglas Clayton
Jeremy B. Cohen
Teresa Coleman Wash
Stephen Paul Columbia
Bunni Copaken
Jill Cornell
Sophie Cripe
Joshua Dachs
Ako Dachs
Cathy Dantchik
André De Shields
Carmel Dean
Teresa Del Piero
Jamie Deroy
Fred Dixon
Norman Dixon
Melissa Doyle
Blair M. Duncan
Drina Durazo
Shiree Dyson
Paula Eagleman
Lateshia Ellerson
Trey Ellett
Teresa Eyring
Joan Feinberg
Sean Fenton
Helena Fifer
Karena Fiorenza

Sally Fischer
Sean Patrick Flahaven
Charlotte Fleck
Eve Foldan
Andres Franco
BK Fulton
Olga Garay-English
Anthony J. Garcia
Hanay Geiogamah
Angela Lee Gieras
Carson Gleberman
Keli Goff
Moses Goldberg
Margaret L. Goodman
Alex Goodman
Heidi Graham
Martine Kei Green-Rogers
Sadie Groom
Annabel Guevara
Iliana Guibert
Harvey M. Guion
William Haber
Dorian Harewood
Jane Harmon
Dwayne Hartford
Kate Moore Heaney
Alfred Heartley
Ruth Hendel
Nathan Henry
Lillian Henry
Brian Hieggelke
Temah Higgins
Sharmon J. Hilfinger
Rebecca Hopkins
Jamal Howard
Quiara Alegria Hudes
Cynthia Huffman
Eugene Hutchins
David Henry Hwang
Laura Innes
Mike Isaacson
Pennymaria Jackson
Michael Jenkins
Merrique Jenson
Foster Johns
Marshall Jones
Jerome Kane
Victoria Keller

Randall Kender
Thomas J. Kesolits
Thomas Kleinert
Daniel Lynn Korengold
Verleah B. Kosloske
Rachel Kraft
Angela Lam
Rachel Lampert
Emily Hooper Lansana
Kristin A. Larsen
M. Sweeney Lawless
Walter Dirk Leatherman
Alyce Lee
Robin Leeds
Ron Legler
Sharon Light
Sandra Liotta
Jessica Litman
Abby Lynch
Sheila Anne Malone
Richard Maltby
Emily Mann
Joan Marcus
Annamarie Marks
Catie Marron
Laurie McCants
William McCausland
Jennifer McClendon
Maeve McGuire
Ellen McLaughlin
Lucas McMahon
Derek Lee McPhatter
Charlie Miller
Martin Miller
Frank Minano
Joanna Minerley
Roland Moore
Louis Morrell
Lisa Mount
George T. Munsterman
Amy L. Murphy
Terry Nemeth
Nathaniel Graham Nesmith
Pamela Newkirk
Warren Nichols
Pamela Nichter
Kathryn Nolan
Bethany Nothstein

Jack O'Brien
Jeffrey O'Malley
Evren Odcikin
David Olson
Patrick Pacheco
Lois C. Padawer
Suzanne A. Page
Maurice Emmanuel Parent
William Parry
Estelle Parsons
Lisa Lacroce Patterson
Emma Penny
Diana Phillips
Thomas Pierce
Delaney Piggins
Richard J. Poccia
Meghan Pressman
David Ralphe
Ann Ramsay-Jenkins
William J. Reynolds
Mark J. Robman
David Rockwell
John Rooney
Daryl Roth
Janette Roush
Judith Rubin
Fiona Howe Rudin
Richard Rundle
Robert Russo
Steven James Rust
Jean Gordon Ryon
David Saar
Laura Sametz
Olga Sanchez Saltveit
Tony Santiago
Doreen Sayegh
Falynn Schmidt
Erik Schroeder
Mary Schuermann
Susan J. Schwirck
Steve Scott
Clare Sebenius
Denise Serna
Hana Sharif
Michele Shay
Jana Shea
Munroe Shearer
John Shivers

Nancy Simon
Emilia Smart-Denson
Kelundra Smith
Malkia Stampley
Harold Steward
Allison Arkell Stockman
Seema Sueko
K Zaheerah Sultan
Julie Taymor
Traci Tolmaire
Sneja Tomassian
Diep Tran
Jesse I. Treu
Alina Troyano
Todd Tucker
Rebecca Udden
Shaheen Vaaz
Clyde Valentín
Elizabeth Van Dyke
Reginald Van Lee
Marc Viscardi
Scott Walecka
Julie Walker
Megan Wanlass
Michelle Washington
Jerry Watt
Michael Weller
Diane Whatton
Fredric M. Wild
Amos Tappan Wilder
Robert Wildman
Ludy Marvin Wilkie
Suzy Willhoft
Schele Williams
Ben Wolfe
Harold Wolpert
Linda Wong
Celia Wren
Kim Wright
William Yang
Michelle Yaroshko
Diane Yu
Jennifer Zeyl
Anonymous Donor
Anonymous Donor

This list is complete as of November 10, 2024. We do our best to ensure that all donor listings are current and correct. To update your listing, please email Lisa Purrone, Individual Giving Manager, at lpurrone@tcg.org or call 212-609-5961.

To join in ensuring that TCG continues to thrive, please contact the Development Team at 212-609-5961 or email Lisa Purrone, lpurrone@tcg.org. Theatre Communications Group (EIN: 13-6160130) is a U.S. 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions to TCG are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.

tcg

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP'S MISSION IS TO...

lead for a just and thriving theatre ecology

NETWORKING AND KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING

◆

TCG's **Research** programs include long-standing studies such as the **Salary Survey** and **Fiscal Survey**, as well as responsive snapshot surveys.

◆

The **National Conference** is a biennial gathering of theatre professionals to forge connections, address field-wide issues, and celebrate the theatre of the host community.

◆

Theatre for Activism is a series of gatherings to strengthen care, share practices, and forge connections between activists and theatre practitioners.

GRANTMAKING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

◆

THRIVE! Uplifting Theatres of Color provides unrestricted funds for those who have all too often been outside the grantmaking sector's funding opportunities: Black theatres, Indigenous theatres and Theatres of Color which are closely connected to and have positive impact on their chosen communities.

◆

The Rising Leaders of Color Program forms cohorts of exceptionally talented early-career leaders of color who participate in professional development workshops and events.

◆

The **Willa Kim Costume Design Scholarship** provides exceptionally talented costume designers who are enrolled in a university or professional training program funds to be used towards tuition, registration, and/or supplies for an extracurricular (non-credit) training in hand-drawing and/or painting.

AMERICAN THEATRE
Brighter Futures
ENGLISH
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama
SANAZ TOOSSI
WISH YOU WERE HERE

PUBLISHING

◆

TCG Books is the largest independent trade publisher of dramatic literature in North America with more than 400 volumes in print including 21 winners of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

◆

For over 40 years, **ARTSEARCH®** is the essential source for job and talent seekers in the arts, and is now free for all job seekers.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

◆

TCG's **art advocacy efforts** over the past several years have contributed to the **largest federal investment in the arts** since the WPA in the 1930s. Other advocacy issues include: tax incentives for charitable giving, improving the visa process for international artists from abroad, and advocating for legislation that protects theatres and their ticket-buyers from predatory and deceptive practices.

◆

Through the **Global Theater Initiative**, TCG's partnership with the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, TCG serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI). TCG issues peer consultation letters for international **visa petitions** and brings **delegations** of U.S. theatre professionals to international festivals and convenings.

TCG Staff

Executive Office

LaTeshia Ellerson, *Co-Executive Director: National Engagement*

Emilya Cachapero, *Co-Executive Director: National and Global Programming*

Alisha Tonsic, *Co-Executive Director: National Operations and Business Development*

National Operations and Business Development

Sol Oliver, *National Operations and Business Development Manager*

Oscar Cabrera, *Systems Administrator and Office Manager*

People and Culture

LaDonna Lane, *People and Culture Director*

Marketing and Communications

Joshua H. Jenkins, *Director of Marketing and Communications*

Breana (Bree) Olgadez, *Marketing and Communications Manager*

Monet Cogbill, *Design Manager*

Programming Ensemble

Raksak (Big) Kongseng, *Lead of Grantmaking and Global Programs*

Ciara Diane, *Lead of Community Engagement Programs*

Corinna Schulenburg, *Co-Lead of Research Programs*

Rachael Hip-Flores, *Co-Lead of Research Programs*

Erica Lauren Ortiz, *Interim Lead of Advocacy & Governance Programs*

Membership

Jennifer Cleary, *Membership Engagement Director*

Lauren Sullivan, *Membership Manager*

Jupiter Lê, *Membership Assistant*

Institutional Philanthropy

Danika Tablante, *Institutional Philanthropy Manager*

Larsen Kennedy, *Institutional Philanthropy Associate*

Individual Giving

Lisa Purrone, *Individual Giving Manager*

Leah Gabriel, *Individual Giving Associate*

Finance & Administration

Jessica Adler, ArtsFMS, *Financial Management Services*

Clarissa Soto Josephs, *ArtsFMS, Financial Management Services*

Valerie Murray, ArtsFMS, *Financial Management Services*

TCG Books

Kathy Sova, *Editorial Director*

Emma Walsh, *Senior Managing Editor*

Veronica Diaz, *Publications Business Manager*

Advertising (Digital and ArtSearch)

Carol Van Keuren, *Director of Advertising*

Lèna Chilingerian, *Circulation and Sales Associate*

American Theatre

Kelundra Smith, *Director of Publications*

Rob Weinert-Kendt, *Editor-in-chief*

Jerald Raymond Pierce, *Managing Editor*

Gabriela Furtado Coutinho, *Digital Editor*

Board

Nataki Garrett, *Chair*

John Fontillas, *Vice Chair*

Merrique Jenson, *Vice Chair*

Hana Sharif, *Vice Chair*

Angela Lee Gieras, *Treasurer*

Jennifer Bielstein

Jeremy B Cohen

Hanay Geiogamah

Qween Jean

Harold Steward

National Council for the American Theatre

TCG is grateful for the generous support of the members of the National Council for the American Theatre (NCAT). Founded in 1997 and composed of leading trustees from member theatres across the country and other theatre supporters, NCAT guides TCG's programs on governance and board development and serves as a "brain trust" for the organization. For information on joining the National Council, please contact Erica Lauren Ortiz, Lead of Advocacy & Governance Programs at eortiz@tcg.org.

Judith O. Rubin* *Council Co-Chair*, Playwrights Horizons (New York, NY)

James L. Chosy *Council Co-Chair*, Guthrie Theater (Minneapolis, Minn.)

Eve Alvord* Seattle Children's Theatre (Seattle, Wash.)

Jeffrey D. Bores Playwrights' Center (Minneapolis, Minn.)

Michelle Branch Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture (San Francisco, Calif.)

Bunni Copaken Kansas City Repertory Theatre (Kansas City, Mo.)

Sophie Cripe South Coast Repertory (Costa Mesa, Calif.)

Brad Edgerton Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Ashland, Ore.)

Ruth Hendel Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center (Waterford, CT)

Cynthia Huffman ACT Contemporary Theatre (Seattle, Wash.)

Bruce E.H. Johnson Seattle Repertory Theatre (Seattle, Wash.)

Myla Lerner Lean Ensemble Theater (Hilton Head, SC)

Lynelle Lynch La Jolla Playhouse (La Jolla, Calif.)

David Moore, Jr. Guthrie Theater (Minneapolis, Minn.)

Julie Morris PlayMakers Repertory Company (Raleigh, NC)

Eleanor Cook Nolan* Seattle Children's Theatre (Seattle, Wash.)

Betsy Pitts Atlantic Theater Company (New York, NY)

Rusty Rueff American Conservatory Theater (San Francisco, Calif.)

David E. Shiffrin Arena Stage (Washington D.C.)

Diane Whatton Lookingglass Theatre Company (Chicago, Ill.)

Diane C. Yu Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Ashland, Ore.)

**Founding Member*

Performing Arts Alliance

Theatre Communications Group is a proud founding member of the Performing Arts Alliance (PAA). The PAA organization advocates for America's professional nonprofit arts sector before Congress and key policy makers. Current members include:

Alliance of Artists Communities

Alternate ROOTS

American Composers Forum

Association of Performing Arts Professionals

Chamber Music America

Chorus America

Dance/USA

Folk Alliance International

The International Association of Blacks in Dance

League of American Orchestras

National Alliance for Musical Theatre

National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures

National Performance Network

Network of Ensemble Theaters

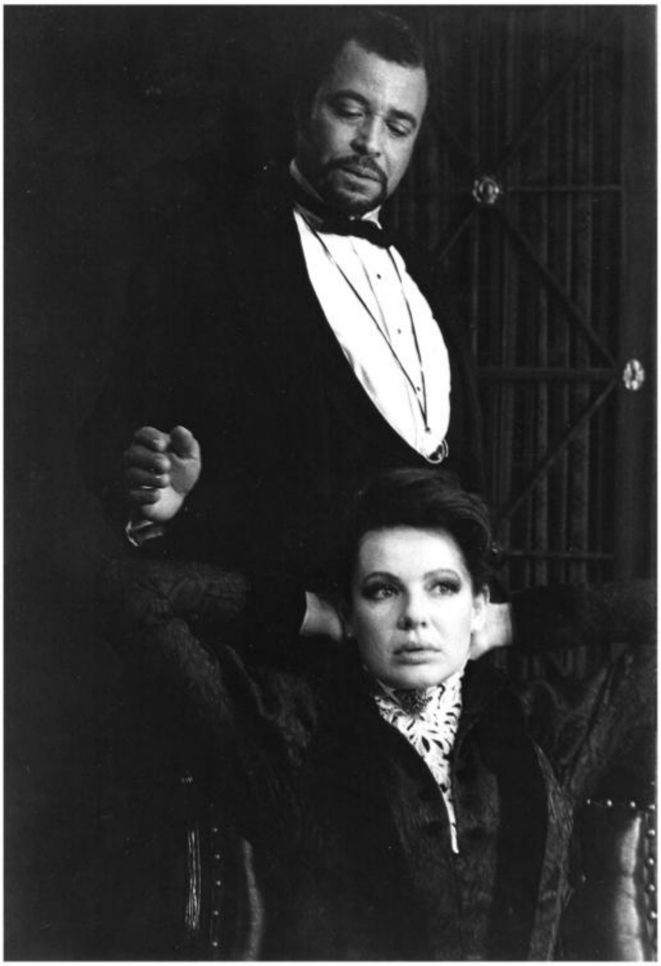
OPERA America

Theatre Communications Group

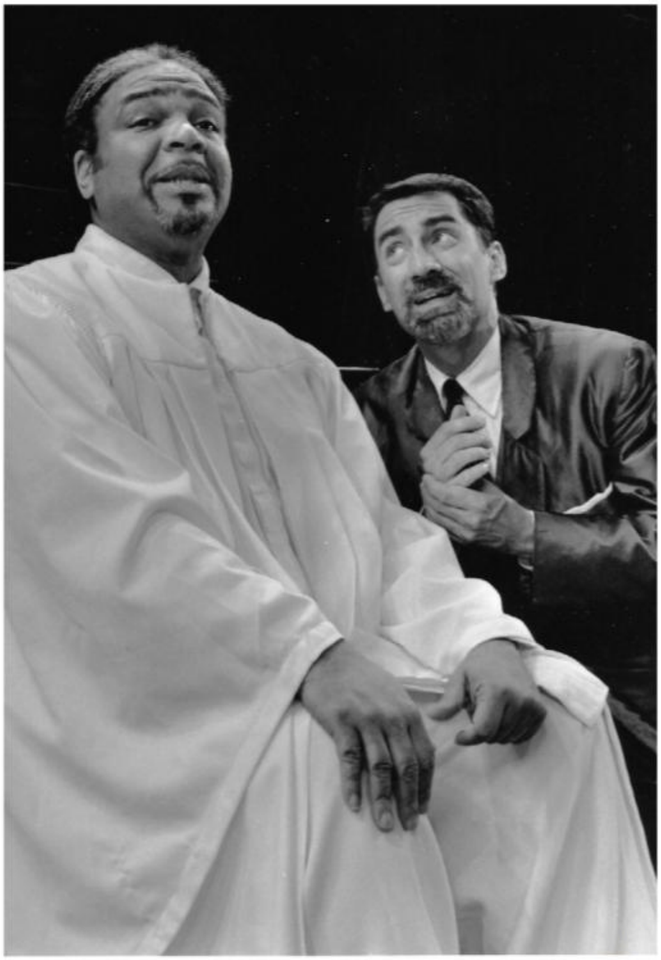
To learn more about how TCG advocates for the arts year round, visit tcg.org.

From the Archives

CAN YOU NAME THE PERFORMERS AND THE SHOWS?



James Earl Jones and Dianne Wiest in "Hedda Gabler" by Henrik Ibsen at Yale Repertory Theatre in 1981. (Photo by Gerry Goodstein)



Ken Page and David Garrison in Randy Newman's "Faust" at La Jolla Playhouse in 1995. (Photo by Ken Howard)

We can imagine you here.

David Geffen School of Drama at Yale's graduate conservatory focuses on applicants' artistry, self-awareness, collaborative skill, curiosity, resilience, and ambition. Full-time students in degree and certificate programs receive 100% tuition scholarship. Financial aid for living expenses and supplies is awarded based on demonstrated financial need.

We train and advance leaders in the practice of every theatrical discipline:

Acting

Directing

Design:
costume, lighting, projection, scenic, and sound

Dramaturgy & Dramatic Criticism

Playwriting

Stage Management

Technical Design & Production

Theater Management

Technical Internship:
costume, electrics, projection, properties, scene painting, scene shop, and sound

DAVID
GEFFEN
SCHOOL OF
DRAMA
AT YALE

Applications are open for the 2025–26 school year. Apply now!

drama.yale.edu

ABOVE: Whitney Andrews '24 in a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare, adapted by Kemar Jewel '24 and Shyama Iyer '25, directed and choreographed by Kemar Jewel. Sound Designer, Composer, and Music Director—Stan Mathabane '24; Scenic Designer—Patti Panyakaew '25; Costume Designer—Micah Ohno '25; Lighting Designer—Larry Ortiz '26; Projection Designer—Doaa Ouf '25; Production Dramaturg—Shyama Iyer; Technical Director—John Simone '25; Fight Directors—Kelsey Rainwater and Michael Rossmy (faculty); Stage Manager—Caileigh Potter '26. Photo © Maza Rey, 2024.

STELLADLER
STUDIO OF ACTING®

75 YEARS OF Imagination

The Stella Adler Studio of Acting celebrates its 75th Anniversary, marking a legacy of inspiring generations of actors dedicated to the pursuit of artistic excellence and uplifting humanity.

PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATORY

An Accredited, Affordable MFA Alternative

3-Year Conservatory
2-Year Evening Conservatory
Los Angeles Conservatory

Our 2025 Audition Tour Begins in January!

SUMMER INTENSIVES

Summer Conservatory
Musical Theater
Shakespeare
Chekhov
Film & Television
Self-Generated Theater
Physical Theater
Teacher Training
Musical Theater for Film
Teen Summer Conservatory
Teen New Works Intensive

ACTOR WORKSHOPS

Courses include ...

Acting Technique
Scene Study
On-Camera Acting
Shakespeare
Voice & Speech
Movement
Voice Over

... and many more!

Stella Adler Studio of Acting
65 Broadway Floor 2, New York, NY 10006
classes.StellaAdler.com | 212-689-0087
classes@stellaadler.com

Art of Acting Studio
1017 N Orange Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90038
ArtofActingStudio.com | 323-601-5310
info@artofactingstudio.com

In accordance with provisions of the California Education Code 94866, 94890, Art of Acting Studio has been licensed to operate as an Accredited School by the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education. The Art of Acting Studio is in compliance with state standards set forth in this chapter.

The Stella Adler Studio of Acting / Art of Acting Studio is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization and is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre.